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ON COMPROMISE

'It makes all the difference in the world whether we put Truth in the first place or in the second place.'

WHATELY.

ON COMPROMISE

BY

JOHN MORLEY

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NOTE.

THE writer has availed himself of the opportunity of a new edition to add three or four additional illustrations in the footnotes. The criticisms on the first edition call for no remark, excepting this, perhaps,—that the present little volume has no pretensions to be anything more than an Essay. To judge such a performance as if it professed to be an exhaustive Treatise in casuistry, is to subject it to tests which it was never designed to bear. Merely to open questions, to indicate points, to suggest cases, to sketch outlines,—as an Essay does all these things,—may often be a process not without its own modest usefulness and interest.

May 4, 1877.

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ON COMPROMISE.

CHAPTER I.

INTRODUCTORY.

THE design of the following essay is to consider, in a short and direct way, some of the limits that are set by sound reason to the practice of the various arts of accommodation, economy, management, conformity, or compromise. The right of thinking freely and acting independently, of using our minds without excessive awe of authority, and shaping our lives without unquestioning obedience to custom, is now a finally accepted principle in some sense or other with every school of thought that has the smallest chance of commanding the future. Under what circumstances does the exercise and vindication of the right, thus conceded in theory, become a positive duty in practice? If the majority are bound to tolerate dissent from

the ruling opinions and beliefs, under what conditions and within what limitations is the dissentient imperatively bound to avail himself of this toleration? How far, and in what way, ought respect either for immediate practical convenience, or for current prejudices, to weigh against respect for truth? For how much is it well that the individual should allow the feelings and convictions of the many to count, when he comes to shape, to express, and to act upon his own feelings and convictions? Are we only to be permitted to defend general principles, on condition that we draw no practical inferences from them? Is every other idea to yield precedence and empire to existing circumstances, and is the immediate and universal workableness of a policy to be the main test of its intrinsic fitness?

To attempt to answer all these questions fully would be nothing less than to attempt a compendium of life and duty in all their details, a Summa of cases of conscience, a guide to doubters at every point of the compass. The aim of the present writer is a comparatively modest one; namely, to seek one or two of the most general principles

which ought to regulate the practice of compliance, and to suggest some of the bearings which they may have in their application to certain difficulties in modern matters of conduct.

It is pretty plain that an inquiry of this kind needs to be fixed by reference to a given set of social circumstances tolerably well understood. There are some common rules as to the expediency of compromise and conformity, but their application is a matter of endless variety and the widest elasticity. The interesting and useful thing is to find the relation of these too vague rules to actual conditions; to transform them into practical guides and real interpreters of what is right and best in thought and conduct, in a special and definite kind of emergency. According to the current assumptions of the writer and the preacher, the one commanding law is that men should cling to truth and right, if the very heavens fall. In principle this is universally accepted. To the partisans of authority and tradition it is as much a commonplace as to the partisans of the most absolute and unflinching rationalism. Yet in practice all schools alike are forced to

admit the necessity of a measure of accommodation in the very interests of truth itself. Fanatic is a name of such ill repute, exactly because one who deserves to be called by it injures good causes by refusing timely and harmless concession; by irritating prejudices that a wiser way of urging his own opinion might have turned aside; by making no allowances, respecting no motives, and recognising none of those qualifying principles, which are nothing less than necessary to make his own principle true and fitting in a given society. The interesting question in connection with compromise obviously turns upon the placing of the boundary that divides wise suspense in forming opinions, wise reserve in expressing them, and wise tardiness in trying to realise them, from unavowed disingenuousness and self-illusion, from voluntary dissimulation, and from indolence and pusillanimity. These are the three departments or provinces of compromise. Our subject is a question of boundaries.[1] And this question, being mainly one of time and circumstance, may be most satisfactorily discussed in relation to the time and the circumstances

[1] See below, ch. iii.

which we know best, or at least whose deficiencies and requirements are most pressingly visible to us.

Though England counts her full share of fearless truth-seekers in most departments of inquiry, yet there is on the whole no weakening, but a rather marked confirmation, of what has become an inveterate national characteristic, and has long been recognised as such; a profound distrust, namely, of all general principles; a profound dislike both of much reference to them, and of any disposition to invest them with practical authority; and a silent but most pertinacious measurement of philosophic truths by political tests. 'It is not at all easy, humanly speaking,' says one who has tried the experiment, 'to wind an Englishman up to the level of dogma.' The difficulty has extended further than the dogma of theology. The supposed antagonism between expediency and principle has been pressed further and further away from the little piece of true meaning that it ever could be rightly allowed to have, until it has now come to signify the paramount wisdom of counting the narrow, immediate, and personal expediency for everything, and the whole, general,

ultimate, and completed expediency for nothing. Principle is only another name for a proposition stating the terms of one of these larger expediencies. When principle is held in contempt, or banished to the far dreamland of the philosopher and the student, with an affectation of reverence that in a materialist generation is in truth the most overweening kind of contempt, this only means that men are thinking much of the interests of to-day, and little of the more ample interests of the many days to come. It means that the conditions of the time are unfriendly to the penetration and the breadth of vision which disclose to us the whole range of consequences that follow on certain kinds of action or opinion, and unfriendly to the intrepidity and disinterestedness which make us willing to sacrifice our own present ease or near convenience, in the hope of securing higher advantages for others or for ourselves in the future.

Let us take politics, for example. What is the state of the case with us, if we look at national life in its broadest aspect? A German has his dream of a great fatherland which shall not only be one and consolidated, but shall in due season win free-

dom for itself, and be as a sacred hearth whence others may borrow the warmth of freedom and order for themselves. A Spaniard has his vision either of militant loyalty to God and the saints and the exiled line of his kings, or else of devotion to the newly won liberty and to the raising up of his fallen nation. An American, in the midst of the political corruption which for the moment obscures the great democratic experiment, yet has his imagination kindled by the size and resources of his land, and his enthusiasm fired by the high destinies which he believes to await its people in the centuries to come. A Frenchman, republican or royalist, with all his frenzies and 'fool-fury' of red or white, still has his hope and dream and aspiration, with which to enlarge his life and lift him on an ample pinion out from the circle of a poor egoism. What stirs the hope and moves the aspiration of our Englishman? Surely nothing either in the heavens above or on the earth beneath. The English are as a people little susceptible in the region of the imagination. But they have done good work in the world, acquired a splendid historic tradition of stout combat for

good causes, founded a mighty and beneficent empire; and they have done all this notwithstanding their deficiencies of imagination. Their lands have been the home of great and forlorn causes, though they could not always follow the transcendental flights of their foreign allies and champions. If Englishmen were not strong in imagination, they were what is better and surer, strong in their hold of the great emancipating principles. What great political cause, her own or another's, is England befriending to-day? To say that no great cause is left, is to tell us that we have reached the final stage of human progress, and turned over the last leaf in the volume of human improvements. The day when this is said and believed marks the end of a nation's life. Is it possible that, after all, our old protestant spirit, with its rationality, its austerity, its steady political energy, has been struck with something of the mortal fatigue that seizes catholic societies after their fits of revolution?

We need not forget either the atrocities or the imbecilities which mark the course of modern politics on the Continent. I am as keenly alive

as any one to the levity of France, and the ὕβρις of Germany. It may be true that the ordinary Frenchman is in some respects the victim of as poor an egoism as that of the ordinary Englishman; and that the American has no advantage over us in certain kinds of magnanimous sentiment. What is important is the mind and attitude, not of the ordinary man, but of those who should be extraordinary. The decisive sign of the elevation of a nation's life is to be sought among those who lead or ought to lead. The test of the health of a people is to be found in the utterances of those who are its spokesmen, and in the action of those whom it accepts or chooses to be its chiefs. We have to look to the magnitude of the issues and the height of the interests which engage its foremost spirits. What are the best men in a country striving for? And is the struggle pursued intrepidly and with a sense of its size and amplitude, or with creeping foot and blinking eye? The answer to these questions is the answer to the other question, whether the best men in the country are small or great. It is a commonplace that the manner of

doing things is often as important as the things done. And it has been pointed out more than once that England's most creditable national action constantly shows itself so poor and mean in expression that the rest of Europe can discern nothing in it but craft and sinister interest. Our public opinion is often rich in wisdom, but we lack the courage of our wisdom. We execute noble achievements, and then are best pleased to find shabby reasons for them.

There is a certain quality attaching alike to thought and expression and action, for which we may borrow the name of grandeur. It has been noticed, for instance, that Bacon strikes and impresses us, not merely by the substantial merit of what he achieved, but still more by a certain greatness of scheme and conception. This quality is not a mere idle decoration. It is not a theatrical artifice of mask or buskin, to impose upon us unreal impressions of height and dignity. The added greatness is real. Height of aim and nobility of expression are true forces. They grow to be an obligation upon us. A lofty sense of personal worth is one of the surest elements of

greatness. That the lion should love to masquerade in the ass's skin is not modesty and reserve, but imbecility and degradation. And that England should wrap herself in the robe of small causes and mean reasons is the more deplorable, because there is no nation in the world the substantial elements of whose power are so majestic and imperial as our own. Our language is the most widely spoken of all tongues, its literature is second to none in variety and power. Our people, whether English or American, have long ago superseded the barbarous device of dictator and Cæsar by the manly arts of self-government. We understand that peace and industry are the two most indispensable conditions of modern civilisation, and we draw the lines of our policy in accordance with such a conviction. We have had imposed upon us by the unlucky prowess of our ancestors the task of ruling a vast number of millions of alien dependents. We undertake it with a disinterestedness, and execute it with a skill of administration, to which history supplies no parallel, and which, even if time should show that the conditions of the problem were insoluble,

will still remain for ever admirable. All these are elements of true pre-eminence. They are calculated to inspire us with the loftiest consciousness of national life. They ought to clothe our voice with authority, to nerve our action by generous resolution, and to fill our counsels with weightiness and power.

Within the last forty years England has lost one by one each of those enthusiasms which may have been illusions,—some of them undoubtedly were so,—but which at least testified to the existence among us, in a very considerable degree, of a vivid belief in the possibility of certain broad general theories being true and right, as well as in the obligation of making them lights to practical conduct and desire. People a generation ago had eager sympathy with Hungary, with Italy, with Poland, because they were deeply impressed by the doctrine of nationalities. They had again a generous and energetic hatred of such an institution as the negro slavery of America, because justice and humanity and religion were too real and potent forces within their breasts to allow them to listen to those political considerations by

which American statesmen used to justify temporising and compromise. They had strong feelings about Parliamentary Reform, because they were penetrated by the principle that the possession of political power by the bulk of a society is the only effective security against sinister government; or else by the principle that participation in public activity, even in the modest form of an exercise of the elective franchise, is an elevating and instructing agency; or perhaps by the principle that justice demands that those who are compelled to obey laws and pay national taxes should have a voice in making the one and imposing the other.

It may be said that the very fate of these aspirations has had a blighting effect on public enthusiasm and the capacity of feeling it. Not only have most of them now been fulfilled, and so passed from aspiration to actuality, but the results of their fulfilment have been so disappointing as to make us wonder whether it is really worth while to pray, when to have our prayers granted carries the world so very slight a way forward. The Austrian is no longer in Italy; the Pope has ceased to be master in Rome; the patriots of

Hungary are now in possession of their rights, and have become friends of their old oppressors; the negro slave has been transformed into an American citizen. At home, again, the gods have listened to our vows. Parliament has been reformed, and the long-desired mechanical security provided for the voter's freedom. We no longer aspire after all these things, you may say, because our hopes have been realised and our dreams have come true. It is possible that the comparatively prosaic results before our eyes at the end of all have thrown a chill over our political imagination. What seemed so glorious when it was far off, seems perhaps a little poor now that it is near; and this has damped the wing of political fancy. The old aspirations have vanished, and no new ones have arisen in their place. Be the cause what it may, I should express the change in this way, that the existing order of facts, whatever it may be, now takes a hardly disputed precedence with us over ideas, and that the coarsest political standard is undoubtingly and finally applied over the whole realm of human thought.

The line taken up by the press and the govern-

ing classes of England during the American Civil War may serve to illustrate the kind of mood which we conceive to be gaining firmer hold than ever of the national mind. Those who sympathised with the Southern States listened only to political arguments, and very narrow and inefficient political arguments, as it happened, when they ought to have seen that here was an issue which involved not only political ideas, but moral and religious ideas as well. That is to say, the ordinary political tests were not enough to reveal the entire significance of the crisis, nor were the political standards proper for measuring the whole of the expediencies hanging in the balance. The conflict could not be adequately gauged by such questions as whether the Slave States had or had not a constitutional right to establish an independent government; whether the Free States were animated by philanthropy or by love of empire; whether it was to the political advantage of England that the American Union should be divided and consequently weakened. Such questions were not necessarily improper in themselves, and we can imagine circumstances in which they

might be not only proper but decisive. But, the circumstances being what they were, the narrower expediencies of ordinary politics were outweighed by one of those supreme and indefeasible expediencies which are classified as moral. These are, in other words, the higher, wider, more binding, and transcendent part of the master art of social wellbeing.

Here was only one illustration of the growing tendency to substitute the narrowest political point of view for all the other ways of regarding the course of human affairs, and to raise the limitations which practical exigencies may happen to set to the application of general principles, into the very place of the principles themselves. Nor is the process of deteriorating conviction confined to the greater or noisier transactions of nations. It is impossible that it should be so. That process is due to causes which affect the mental temper as a whole, and pour round us an atmosphere that enervates our judgment from end to end, not more in politics than in morality, and not more in morality than in philosophy, in art, and in religion. Perhaps this tendency never showed

itself more offensively than when the most important newspaper in the country criticised our great naturalist's scientific speculations as to the descent of man, from the point of view of property, intelligence, and a stake in the country, and severely censured him for revealing his particular zoological conclusions to the general public, at a moment when the sky of Paris was red with the incendiary flames of the Commune. It would be hard to reduce the transformation of all truth into a subordinate department of daily politics, to a more gross and unseemly absurdity.

The consequences of such a transformation, of putting immediate social convenience in the first place, and respect for truth in the second, are seen, as we have said, in a distinct and unmistakable lowering of the level of national life; a slack and lethargic quality about public opinion; a growing predominance of material, temporary, and selfish aims, over those which are generous, far-reaching, and spiritual; a deadly weakening of intellectual conclusiveness, and clear-shining moral illumination, and, lastly, of a certain stoutness of self-respect for which England was once especially

famous. A plain categorical proposition is becoming less and less credible to average minds. Or at least the slovenly willingness to hold two directly contradictory propositions at one and the same time is becoming more and more common. In religion, morals, and politics, the suppression of your true opinion, if not the positive profession of what you hold to be a false opinion, is hardly ever counted a vice, and not seldom even goes for virtue and solid wisdom. One is conjured to respect the beliefs of others, but forbidden to claim the same respect for one's own.

This dread of the categorical proposition might be creditable, if it sprang from attachment to a very high standard of evidence, or from a deep sense of the relative and provisional quality of truth. There might even be a plausible defence set up for it, if it sprang from that formulated distrust of the energetic rational judgment in comparison with the emotional, affective, contemplative parts of man, which underlies the various forms of religious mysticism. If you look closely into our present mood, it is seen to be the product mainly and above all of a shrinking deference to the

status quo, not merely as having a claim not to be lightly dealt with, which every serious man concedes, but as being the last word and final test of truth and justice. Physical science is allowed to be the sphere of accurate reasoning and distinct conclusions, but in morals and politics, instead of admitting that these subjects have equally a logic of their own, we silently suspect all first principles, and practically deny the strict inferences from demonstrated premisses. Faith in the soundness of given general theories of right and wrong melts away before the first momentary triumph of wrong, or the first passing discouragement in enforcing right.

Our robust political sense, which has discovered so many of the secrets of good government, which has given us freedom with order, and popular administration without corruption, and unalterable respect for law along with indelible respect for individual right, this, which has so long been our strong point, is fast becoming our weakness and undoing. For the extension of the ways of thinking which are proper in politics, to other than political matter, means at the same time the deprava-

tion of the political sense itself. Not only is social expediency effacing the many other points of view that men ought to take of the various facts of life and thought: the idea of social expediency itself is becoming a dwarfed and pinched idea. Ours is the country where love of constant improvement ought to be greater than anywhere else, because fear of revolution is less. Yet the art of politics is growing to be as meanly conceived as all the rest. At elections the national candidate has not often a chance against the local candidate, nor the man of a principle against the man of a class. In parliament we are admonished on high authority that 'the policy of a party is not the carrying out of the opinion of any section of it, but the general consensus of the whole,' which seems to be a hierophantic manner of saying that the policy of a party is one thing, and the principle which makes it a party is another thing, and that men who care very strongly about anything are to surrender that and the hope of it, for the sake of succeeding in something about which they care very little or not at all. This is our modern way of giving politicians heart for their voyage, of

inspiring them with resoluteness and self-respect, with confidence in the worth of their cause and enthusiasm for its success. Thoroughness is a mistake, and nailing your flag to the mast a bit of delusive heroics. Think wholly of to-day, and not at all of to-morrow. Beware of the high and hold fast to the safe. Dismiss conviction, and study general consensus. No zeal, no faith, no intellectual trenchancy, but as much low-minded geniality and trivial complaisance as you please.

Of course, all these characteristics of our own society mark tendencies that are common enough in all societies. They often spring from an indolence and enervation that besets a certain number of people, however invigorating the general mental climate may be. What we are now saying is that the general mental climate itself has, outside of the domain of physical science, ceased to be invigorating; that, on the contrary, it fosters the more inglorious predispositions of men, and encourages a native willingness, already so strong, to acquiesce in a lazy accommodation with error, an ignoble economy of truth, and a vicious compromise of the permanent gains of adhering to

a sound general principle, for the sake of the temporary gains of departing from it.

Without attempting an elaborate analysis of the causes that have brought about this debilitation of mental tone, we may shortly remind ourselves of one or two facts in the political history, in the intellectual history, and in the religious history of this generation, which perhaps help us to understand a phenomenon that we have all so keen an interest both in understanding and in modifying.

To begin with what lies nearest to the surface. The most obvious agency at work in the present exaggeration of the political standard as the universal test of truth, is to be found in some contemporary incidents. The influence of France upon England since the revolution of 1848 has tended wholly to the discredit of abstract theory and general reasoning among us, in all that relates to politics, morals, and religion. In 1848, not in 1789, questions affecting the fundamental structure and organic condition of the social union came for the first time into formidable prominence. For the first time these questions and the answers to

them were stated in articulate formulas and distinct theories. They were not merely written in books; they so fascinated the imagination and inflamed the hopes of the time, that thousands of men were willing actually to go down into the streets and to shed their blood for the realisation of their generous dream of a renovated society. The same sight has been seen since, and even when we do not see it, we are perfectly aware that the same temper is smouldering. Those were premature attempts to convert a crude aspiration into a political reality, and to found a new social order on a number of uncompromising deductions from abstract principles of the common weal. They have had the natural effect of deepening the English dislike of a general theory, even when such a theory did no more than profess to announce a remote object of desire, and not the present goal of immediate effort.

It is not only the Socialists who are responsible for the low esteem into which a spirit of political generalisation has fallen in other countries, in consequence of French experience. Mr. Mill has described in a well-known passage the character-

istic vice of the leaders of all French parties, and not of the democratic party more than any other. 'The commonplaces of politics in France,' he says, 'are large and sweeping practical maxims, from which, as ultimate premisses, men reason downwards to particular applications, and this they call being logical and consistent. For instance, they are perpetually arguing that such and such a measure ought to be adopted, because it is a consequence of the principle on which the form of government is founded; of the principle of legitimacy, or the principle of the sovereignty of the people. To which it may be answered that if these be really practical principles, they must rest on speculative grounds; the sovereignty of the people (for example) must be a right foundation for government, because a government thus constituted tends to produce certain beneficial effects. Inasmuch, however, as no government produces all possible beneficial effects, but all are attended with more or fewer inconveniences; and since these cannot be combated by means drawn from the very causes which produce them, it would often be a much stronger recommendation of some

practical arrangement that it does not follow from what is called the general principle of the government, than that it does.'[1]

The English feeling for compromise is on its better side the result of a shrewd and practical, though informal, recognition of a truth which the writer has here expressed in terms of Method. The disregard which the political action of France has repeatedly betrayed of a principle really so important has hitherto strengthened our own regard for it, until it has not only made us look on its importance as exclusive and final, but has extended our respect for the right kind of compromise to wrong and injurious kinds.

A minor event, which now looks much less important than it did not many years ago, but which still had real influence in deteriorating moral judgment, was the career of a late sovereign of France. Some apparent advantages followed for a season from a rule which had its origin in a violent and perfidious usurpation, and which was upheld by all the arts of moral corruption, political enervation, and military repression. The advantages lasted

[1] *System of Logic*, bk. vi. ch. xi.

long enough to create in this country a steady and powerful opinion that Napoleon the Third's early crime was redeemed by the seeming prosperity which followed. The shocking prematureness of this shallow condonation is now too glaringly visible for any one to deny it. Not often in history has the great truth that 'morality is the nature of things' received corroboration so prompt and timely. We need not commit ourselves to the optimistic or sentimental hypothesis that wickedness always fares ill in the world, or on the other hand that whoso hearkens diligently to the divine voice, and observes all the commandments to do them, shall be blessed in his basket and his store and all the work of his hand. The claims of morality to our allegiance, so far as its precepts are solidly established, rest on the same positive base as our faith in the truth of physical laws. Moral principles, when they are true, are at bottom only registered generalisations from experience. They record certain uniformities of antecedence and consequence in the region of human conduct. Want of faith in the persistency of these uniformities is only a little less fatuous in the moral order

than a corresponding want of faith would instantly disclose itself to be in the purely physical order. In both orders alike there is only too much of this kind of fatuousness, this readiness to believe that for once in our favour the stream shall flow up hill, that we may live in miasmatic air unpoisoned, that a government may depress the energy, the self-reliance, the public spirit of its citizens, and yet be able to count on these qualities whenever the government itself may have broken down, and left the country to make the best of such resources as are left after so severe and prolonged a drain. This is the sense in which morality is the nature of things. The system of the Second Empire was in the same sense an immoral system. Unless all the lessons of human experience were futile, and all the principles of political morality mere articles of pedantry, such a system must inevitably bring disaster, as we might have seen that it was sowing the seeds of disaster. Yet because the catastrophe lingered, opinion in England began to admit the possibility of evil being for this once good, and to treat any reference to the moral and political principles which condemned the imperial system,

and all systems like it, beyond hope or appeal, as simply the pretext of a mutinous or utopian impatience.

This, however, is only one of the more superficial influences which have helped and fallen in with the working of profounder causes of weakened aspiration and impoverished moral energy, and of the substitution of latitudinarian acquiescence and faltering conviction for the whole-hearted assurance of better times. Of these deeper causes, the most important in the intellectual development of the prevailing forms of thought and sentiment is the growth of the Historic Method. Let us consider very shortly how the abuse of this method, and an unauthorised extension and interpretation of its conclusions, are likely to have had something to do with the enervation of opinion.

The Historic Method may be described as the comparison of the forms of an idea, or a usage, or a belief, at any given time, with the earlier forms from which they were evolved, or the later forms into which they were developed, and the establishment, from such a comparison, of an ascending and descending order among the facts. It consists in

the explanation of existing parts in the frame of society by connecting them with corresponding parts in some earlier frame; in the identification of present forms in the past, and past forms in the present. Its main process is the detection of corresponding customs, opinions, laws, beliefs, among different communities, and a grouping of them into general classes with reference to some one common feature. It is a certain way of seeking answers to various questions of origin, resting on the same general doctrine of evolution, applied to moral and social forms, as that which is being applied with so much ingenuity to the series of organic matter. The historic conception is a reference of every state of society to a particular stage in the evolution of its general conditions. Ideas of law, of virtue, of religion, of the physical universe, of history, of the social union itself, all march in a harmonious and inter-dependent order.

Curiosity with reference to origins is for various reasons the most marked element among modern scientific tendencies. It covers the whole field, moral, intellectual, and physical, from the smile or the frown on a man's face, up to the most complex

of the ideas in his mind; from the expression of his emotions, to their root and relations with one another in his inmost organisation. As an ingenious writer, too soon lost to our political literature, has put it:—'If we wanted to describe one of the most marked results, perhaps the most marked result, of late thought, we should say that by it everything is made *an antiquity*. When in former times our ancestors thought of an antiquarian, they described him as occupied with coins and medals and Druids' stones. But now there are other relics; indeed all matter is become such. Man himself has to the eye of science become an antiquity. She tries to read, is beginning to read, knows she ought to read, in the frame of each man the result of a whole history of all his life, and what he is and what makes him so.'[1] Character is considered less with reference to its absolute qualities than as an interesting scene strewn with scattered rudiments, survivals, inherited predispositions. Opinions are counted rather as phenomena to be explained than as matters of truth and falsehood. Of usages, we are beginning first of all

[1] Bagehot.

to think where they came from, and secondarily whether they are the most fitting and convenient that men could be got to accept. In the last century men asked of a belief or a story, Is it true? We now ask, How did men come to take it for true? In short the relations among social phenomena which now engage most attention, are relations of original source, rather than those of actual consistency in theory and actual fitness in practice. The devotees of the current method are more concerned with the pedigree and genealogical connections of a custom or an idea than with its own proper goodness or badness, its strength or its weakness.

Though there is no necessary or truly logical association between systematic use of this method rightly limited, and a slack and slipshod preference of vague general forms over definite ideas, yet every one can see its tendency, if uncorrected, to make men shrink from importing anything like absolute quality into their propositions. We can see also, what is still worse, its tendency to place individual robustness and initiative in the light of superfluities, with which a world that goes by

evolution can very well dispense. Men easily come to consider clearness and positiveness in their opinions, staunchness in holding and defending them, and fervour in carrying them into action, as equivocal virtues of very doubtful perfection, in a state of things where every abuse has after all had a defensible origin; where every error has, we must confess, once been true relatively to other parts of belief in those who held the error; and where all parts of life are so bound up with one another, that it is of no avail to attack one evil, unless you attack many more at the same time. This is a caricature of the real teaching of the Historic Method, of which we shall have to speak presently; but it is one of those caricatures which the natural sloth in such matters, and the indigenous intellectual haziness of the majority of men, make them very willing to take for the true philosophy of things.

Then there is the newspaper press, that huge engine for keeping discussion on a low level, and making the political test final. To take off the taxes on knowledge was to place a heavy tax on

broad and independent opinion. The multiplication of journals 'delivering brawling judgments unashamed on all things all day long,' has done much to deaden the small stock of individuality in public verdicts. It has done much to make vulgar ways of looking at things and vulgar ways of speaking of them stronger and stronger, by formulating and repeating and stereotyping them incessantly from morning until afternoon, and from year's end to year's end. For a newspaper must live, and to live it must please, and its conductors suppose, perhaps not altogether rightly, that it can only please by being very cheerful towards prejudices, very chilly to general theories, loftily disdainful to the men of a principle. Their one cry to an advocate of improvement is some sagacious silliness about recognising the limits of the practicable in politics, and seeing the necessity of adapting theories to facts. As if the fact of taking a broader and wiser view than the common crowd disqualifies a man from knowing what the view of the common crowd happens to be, and from estimating it at the proper value for practical purposes. Why are the men who despair of

improvement to be the only persons endowed with the gift of discerning the practicable? It is, however, only too easy to understand how a journal, existing for a day, should limit its view to the possibilities of the day, and how, being most closely affected by the particular, it should coldly turn its back upon all that is general. And it is easy, too, to understand the reaction of this intellectual timorousness upon the minds of ordinary readers, who have too little natural force and too little cultivation to be able to resist the narrowing and deadly effect of the daily iteration of short-sighted commonplaces.

Far the most penetrating of all the influences that are impairing the moral and intellectual nerve of our generation, remain still to be mentioned. The first of these is the immense increase of material prosperity, and the second is the immense decline in sincerity of spiritual interest. The evil wrought by the one fills up the measure of the evil wrought by the other. We have been, in spite of momentary declensions, on a flood tide of high profits and a roaring trade, and there is

nothing like a roaring trade for engendering latitudinarians. The effect of many possessions, especially if they be newly acquired, in slackening moral vigour, is a proverb. Our new wealth is hardly leavened by any tradition of public duty such as lingers among the English nobles, nor as yet by any common custom of devotion to public causes, such as seems to live and grow in the United States. Under such conditions, with new wealth come luxury and love of ease and that fatal readiness to believe that God has placed us in the best of possible worlds, which so lowers men's aims and unstrings their firmness of purpose. Pleasure saps high interests, and the weakening of high interests leaves more undisputed room for pleasure. Management and compromise appear among the permitted arts, because they tend to comfort, and comfort is the end of ends, comprehending all ends. Not truth is the standard, but the politic and the reputable. Are we to suppose that it is firm persuasion of the greater scripturalness of episcopacy that turns the second generation of dissenting manufacturers in our busy Lancashire into churchmen? Certainly

such conversions do no violence to the conscience of the proselyte, for he is intellectually indifferent, a spiritual neuter.

That brings us to the root of the matter, the serious side of a revolution that in this social consequence is so unspeakably ignoble. This root of the matter is the slow transformation now at work of the whole spiritual basis of thought. Every age is in some sort an age of transition, but our own is characteristically and cardinally an epoch of transition in the very foundations of belief and conduct. The old hopes have grown pale, the old fears dim; strong sanctions are become weak, and once vivid faiths very numb. Religion, whatever destinies may be in store for it, is at least for the present hardly any longer an organic power. It is not that supreme, penetrating, controlling, decisive part of a man's life, which it has been, and will be again. The work of destruction is all the more perturbing to timorous spirits, and more harassing even to doughtier spirits, for being done impalpably, indirectly, almost silently and as if by unseen hands. Those who dwell in the tower of ancient faiths look about them in con-

stant apprehension, misgiving, and wonder, with the hurried uneasy mien of people living amid earthquakes. The air seems to their alarms to be full of missiles, and all is doubt, hesitation, and shivering expectancy. Hence a decisive reluctance to commit one's self. Conscience has lost its strong and on-pressing energy, and the sense of personal responsibility lacks sharpness of edge. The native hue of spiritual resolution is sicklied o'er with the pale cast of distracted, wavering, confused thought. The souls of men have become void. Into the void have entered in triumph the seven devils of Secularity.

And all this hesitancy, this tampering with conviction for fear of its consequences, this want of faithful dealing in the highest matters, is being intensified, aggravated, driven inwards like a fatal disorder toward the vital parts, by the existence of a State Church. While thought stirs and knowledge extends, she remains fast moored by ancient formularies. While the spirit of man expands in search after new light, and feels energetically for new truth, the spirit of the Church is eternally entombed within the four corners of acts of parlia-

ment. Her ministers vow almost before they have crossed the threshold of manhood that they will search no more. They virtually swear that they will to the end of their days believe what they believe then, before they have had time either to think or to know the thoughts of others. They take oath, in other words, to lead mutilated lives. If they cannot keep this solemn promise, they have at least every inducement that ordinary human motives can supply, to conceal their breach of it. The same system which begins by making mental indolence a virtue and intellectual narrowness a part of sanctity, ends by putting a premium on something too like hypocrisy. Consider the seriousness of fastening up in these bonds some thousands of the most instructed and intelligent classes in the country, the very men who would otherwise be best fitted from position and opportunities for aiding a little in the long, difficult, and plainly inevitable work of transforming opinion. Consider the waste of intelligence, and what is assuredly not less grave, the positive dead-weight and thick obstruction, by which an official hierarchy so organised must paralyse mental independence in a community.

We know the kind of man whom this system delights to honour. He was described for us five and thirty years ago by a master hand. 'Mistiness is the mother of wisdom. A man who can set down half a dozen general propositions which escape from destroying one another only by being diluted into truisms; who can hold the balance between opposites so skilfully as to do without fulcrum or beam; who never enunciates a truth without guarding himself against being supposed to exclude the contradictory, — who holds that scripture is the only authority, yet that the Church is to be deferred to, that faith only justifies, yet that it does not justify without works, that grace does not depend upon the sacraments, yet is not given without them, that bishops are a divine ordinance, yet that those who have them not are in the same religious condition as those who have, — this is your safe man and the hope of the Church; this is what the Church is said to want, not party men, but sensible, temperate, sober, well-judging persons, to guide it through the channel of no meaning, between the Scylla and Charybdis of Aye and

No.'[1] The writer then thought that such a type could not endure, and that the Church must become more real. On the contrary, her reality is more phantom-like now than it was then. She is the sovereign pattern and exemplar of management, of the triumph of the political method in spiritual things, and of the subordination of ideas to the *status quo*.

It is true that all other organised priesthoods are also bodies which move within formularies even more inelastic than those of the Establishment. But then they have not the same immense social power, nor the same temptations to make all sacrifices to preserve it. They affect the intellectual temper of large numbers of people, but the people whom they affect are not so strongly identified with the greater organs of the national life. The State Church is bound up in the minds of the most powerful classes with a given ordering of social arrangements, and the consequence of this is that the teachers of the Church have reflected back upon them a sense of responsibility

[1] Dr. J. H. Newman's *Essays Critical and Historical*, vol. i. p. 301.

for these arrangements, which obscures their spirituality, clogs their intellectual energy and mental openness, and turns them into a political army of obstruction to new ideas. They feel themselves to a certain extent discharged from the necessity of recognising the tremendous conflict in the region of belief that goes on around them, just as if they were purely civil administrators, concerned only with the maintenance of the present order. None of this is true of the private Churches. Their teachers and members regard belief as something wholly independent of the civil ordering of things. However little enlightened in some respects, however hostile to certain of the ideas by which it is sought to replace their own, they are at least representatives of the momentous principle of our individual responsibility for the truth of our opinions. They may bring their judgments to conclusions that are less in accord with modern tendencies than those of one or two schools that still see their way to subscribing Anglican articles and administering Anglican rites. At any rate, they admit that the use of his judgment is a duty incumbent on the indi-

vidual, and a duty to be discharged without reference to any external considerations whatever, political or otherwise. This is an elevating, an exhilarating principle, however deficiencies of culture may have narrowed the sphere of its operations. It is because a State Church is by its very conception hostile to such a principle, that we are justified in counting it apart from the private Churches with all their faults, and placing it among the agencies that weaken the vigour of a national conscience and check the free play and access of intellectual light.

Here we may leave the conditions that have made an inquiry as to some of the limits of compromise, which must always be an interesting and important subject, one of especial interest and importance to ourselves at present. Is any renovation of the sacredness of principle a possible remedy for some of these elements of national deterioration? They will not disappear until the world has grown into possession of a new doctrine. When that comes, all other good things will follow. What we have to remember is that the new doctrine itself will never come, except to spirits

predisposed to their own liberation. Our day of small calculations and petty utilities must first pass away; our vision of the true expediencies must reach further and deeper; our resolution to search for the highest verities. to give up all and follow them, must first become the supreme part of ourselves.

CHAPTER II.

OF THE POSSIBLE UTILITY OF ERROR.

Das Wahre fördert; aus dem Irrthum entwickelt sich nichts, er verwickeltuns nur.—
GOETHE.

AT the outset of an inquiry how far existing facts ought to be allowed to overrule ideas and principles that are at variance with them, a preliminary question lies in our way, about which it may be well to say something. This is the question of a dual doctrine. In plainer words, the question whether it is expedient that the more enlightened classes in a community should upon system not only possess their light in silence, but whether they should openly encourage a doctrine for the less enlightened classes which they do not believe to be true for themselves, while they regard it as indispensably useful in the case of less fortunate people. An eminent teacher tells us how after he

had once succeeded in presenting the principle of Necessity to his own mind in a shape which seemed to bring with it all the advantages of the principle of Free Will, he 'no longer suffered under the burden so heavy to one who aims at being a reformer in opinions, of thinking one doctrine true, and the contrary doctrine morally beneficial.'[1] The discrepancy which this writer thought a heavy burden has struck others as the basis of a satisfactory solution.

> Nil dulcius est bene quam munita tenere
> Edita doctrina sapientum templa serena,
> Despicere unde queas alios passimque videre
> Errare atque viam palantes quærere vitæ.

The learned are to hold the true doctrine; the unlearned are to be taught its morally beneficial contrary. 'Let the Church,' it has been said, 'admit two descriptions of believers, those who are for the letter, and those who hold by the spirit. At a certain point in rational culture, belief in the supernatural becomes for many an impossibility; do not force such persons to wear a cowl of lead. Do not you meddle with what

[1] Mill's *Autobiography*, p. 170.

we teach or write, and then we will not dispute the common people with you; do not contest our place in the school and the academy, and then we will surrender to your hands the country school.'[1] This is only a very courageous and definite way of saying what a great many less accomplished persons than M. Renan have silently in their hearts, and in England quite as extensively as in France. They do not believe in hell, for instance, but they think hell a useful fiction for the lower classes. They would deeply regret any change in the spirit or the machinery of public instruction which would release the lower classes from so wholesome an error. And as with hell, so with other articles of the supernatural system; the existence of a Being who will distribute rewards and penalties in a future state, the permanent sentience of each human personality, the vigilant supervision of our conduct, as well as our inmost thoughts and desires, by the heavenly powers; and so forth.

Let us discuss this matter impersonally, without

[1] M. Renan's *Réforme Intellectuelle et Morale de la France*, p. 98.

reference to our own opinions and without reference to the evidence for or against their truth. I am not speaking now of those who hold all these ideas to be certainly true, or highly probable, and who at the same time incidentally insist on the great usefulness of such ideas in confirming morality and producing virtuous types of character. With such persons, of course, there is no question of a dual doctrine. They entertain certain convictions themselves, and naturally desire to have their influence extended over others. The proposition which we have to consider is of another kind. It expresses the notions of those who—to take the most important kind of illustration—think untrue the popular ideas of supernatural interference in our obscure human affairs; who think untrue the notion of the prolongation of our existence after death to fulfil the purpose of the supernatural powers; or at least who think them so extremely improbable that no reasonable man or woman, once awakened to a conviction of this improbability, would thenceforth be capable of receiving effective check or guidance from beliefs, that would have sunk slowly down to the level of

doubtful guesses. We have now to deal with those who while taking this view of certain doctrines, still declare them to be indispensable for restraining from anti-social conduct all who are not acute or instructed enough to see through them. In other words, they think error useful, and that it may be the best thing for society that masses of men should cheat and deceive themselves in their most fervent aspirations and their deepest assurances. This is the furthest extreme to which the empire of existing facts over principles can well be imagined to go. It lies at the root of every discussion upon the limits which separate lawful compromise or accommodation from palpable hypocrisy.

It will probably be said that according to the theory of the school of which M. Renan is the most eloquent representative, the common people are not really cheating themselves or being cheated. Indeed M. Renan himself has expatiated on the charm of seeing figures of the ideal in the cottages of the poor, images representing no reality, and so forth. 'What a delight,' he cries, 'for the man who is borne down by six days of

toil to come on the seventh to rest upon his knees, to contemplate the tall columns, a vault, arches, an altar; to listen to the chanting, to hear moral and consoling words!'[1] The dogmas which criticism attacks are not for these poor people 'the object of an explicit affirmation,' and therefore there is no harm in them; 'it is the privilege of pure sentiment to be invulnerable, and to play with poison without being hurt by it.' In other words, the dogmas are false, but the liturgy, as a performance stirring the senses of awe, reverence, susceptibility to beauty of various kinds, appeals to and satisfies a sentiment that is both true and indispensable in the human mind. More than this, in the two or three supreme moments of life to which men look forward and on which they look back,—at birth, at the passing of the threshold into fulness of life, at marriage, at death,—the Church is present to invest the hour with a certain solemn and dignified charm. That is the way in which the instructed are to look at the services of a Church, after they have themselves ceased to believe its faith, as a true account of

[1] *Etudes d'Histoire Religieuse*, Preface, p. xvi.

various matters which it professes to account for truly.

It will be perceived that this is not exactly the ground of those who think a number of what they confess to be untruths, wholesome for the common people for reasons of police, and who would maintain churches on the same principle on which they maintain the county constabulary. It is a psychological, not a political ground. It is on the whole a more true, as well as a far more exalted position. The human soul, they say, has these lovely and elevating aspirations; not to satisfy them is to leave man a dwarfed creature. Why quarrel with a system that leaves you to satisfy them in the true way, and does much to satisfy them in a false but not very harmful way among those who unfortunately have to sit in the darkness of the outer court?

This is not a proper occasion for saying anything about the adequateness of the catholic, or any other special manner of fostering and solacing the religious impulses of men. We have to assume that the instructed class believe the catholic dogmas to be untrue, and yet wishes the uninstructed to

be handed over to a system that reposes on the theory that these dogmas are superlatively true. What then is to be said of the tenableness of such a position? To the plain man it looks like a deliberate connivance at a plan for the propagation of error—assuming, as I say, for the moment, that these articles of belief are erroneous and contrary to fact and evidence. Ah, but, we are told, the people make no explicit affirmation of dogma; that does nothing for them; they are indifferent to it. A great variety of things might be said to this statement. We might ask, for instance, whether the people ever made an explicit affirmation of dogma in the past, or whether it was always the hazy indifferent matter which it is supposed to be now. If so, whether we shall not have to re-cast our most fundamental notions of the way in which Christian civilisation has been evolved. If not, and if people did once explicitly affirm dogma, when exactly was it that they ceased to do so?

The answers to these questions would all go to show that at the time when religion was the great controlling and organising force in conduct, the

prime elemental dogmas were accepted with the most vivid conviction of reality. I do not pretend that the common people followed all the inferences which the intellectual subtlety of the master-spirits of theology drew so industriously from the simple premisses of scripture and tradition. But assuredly dogma was at the foundation of the whole structure. When did it cease to be so? How was the structure supported, after you had altered this condition of things?

Apart from this historic issue, the main question one would like to put to the upholder of duality of religion on this plea, is the simple one, whether the power of the ceremonial which charms him so much is not actually at this moment drawn wholly from dogma and the tradition of dogma; whether its truth is not explicitly affirmed to the unlettered man, and whether the inseparable connection between the dogma and the ceremonial is not constantly impressed upon him by the spiritual teachers to whom the dual system hands him and his order over for all time? If any one of these philosophic critics will take the trouble to listen to a few courses of sermons at the present day, and the

remark applies not less to protestant than to catholic churches, he will find that instead of that '*parole morale et consolante*' which is so soothing to think of, the pulpit is now the home of fervid controversy and often exacerbated declamation in favour of ancient dogma against modern science. We do not say whether this is or is not the wisest line for the clergy to follow. We only press the fact against those who wish us to believe that dogma counts for nothing in the popular faith, and that therefore we need not be uneasy as to its effects.

Next, one would say to those who think that all will go well if you divide the community into two classes, one privileged to use its own mind, the other privileged to have its mind used by a priesthood, that they overlook the momentous circumstance of these professional upholders of dogmatic systems being also possessed of a vast social influence in questions that naturally belong to another sphere. There is hardly a single great controversy in modern politics, where the statesman does not find himself in immediate contact with the real or supposed interests, and with

the active or passive sentiment, of one of these religious systems. Therefore if the instructed or intellectually privileged class cheerfully leave the field open to men who, *ex hypothesi*, are presumed to be less instructed, narrower, more impenetrable by reason, and the partisans of the letter against the spirit, then this result follows. They are deliberately strengthening the hands of the persons least fitted by judgment, experience, and temper, for using such power rightly. And they are strengthening them not merely in dealing with religious matters, but, what is of more importance, in dealing with an endless variety of the gravest social and political matters. It is impossible to map out the exact dimensions of the field in which a man shall exercise his influence, and to which he is to be rigorously confined. Give men influence in one matter, especially if that be such a matter as religious belief and ceremonial, and it is simply impossible that this influence shall not extend with more or less effect over as much of the whole sphere of conduct as they may choose to claim. This is no discredit to them; on the contrary it is to their honour. So, in short, in

surrendering the common people without dispute or effort to organised priesthoods for religious purposes, you would be inevitably including a vast number of other purposes in the self-same destination. This does not in the least prejudice practical ways of dealing with certain existing circumstances, such as the propriety or justice of allowing a catholic people to have a catholic university. It is only an argument against erecting into a complete and definite formula the division of a society into two great castes, the one with a religion of the spirit, the other with a creed of the letter.

Again, supposing that the enlightened caste were to consent to abandon the common people to what are assumed to be lower and narrower forms of truth,—which is after all little more than a fine phrase for forms of falsehood,—what can be more futile than to suppose that such a compromise will be listened to for a single moment by a caste whose first principle is that they are the possessors and ministers, not of an inferior or superior form of truth, but of the very truth itself, absolute, final, complete, divinely sent, infallibly interpreted?

The disciples of the relative may afford to compromise. The disciples of the absolute, never.

We shall see other objections as we go on to this state of things, in which a minority holds true opinions and abandons the majority to false ones. At the bottom of the advocacy of a dual doctrine slumbers the idea that there is no harm in men being mistaken, or at least only so little harm as is more than compensated for by the marked tranquillity in which their mistake may wrap them. This is not an idea merely that intellectual error is a pathological necessity of the mind, no more to be escaped than the pathological necessities which afflict and finally dissolve the body. That is historically true. It is an idea that error somehow in certain stages, where there is enough of it, actually does good, like vaccination. Well, the thesis of the present chapter is that erroneous opinion or belief, in itself and as such, can never be useful. This may seem a truism which everybody is willing to accept without demur. But it is one of those truisms which persons habitually forget and repudiate in practice, just because they have never made it real to themselves by con-

sidering and answering the objections that may be brought against it. We see this repudiation before our eyes every day. Thus for instance, parents theoretically take it for granted that error cannot be useful, while they are teaching or allowing others to teach their children what they, the parents, believe to be untrue. Thus husbands who think the common theology baseless and unmeaning, are found to prefer that their wives shall not question this theology nor neglect its rites. These are only two out of a hundred examples of the daily admission that error may be very useful to other people. I need hardly say that to deny this, as the commonplace to which this chapter is devoted denies it, is a different thing from denying the expediency of letting errors alone at a given time. That is another question, to be discussed afterwards. You may have a thoroughly vicious and dangerous enemy, and yet it may be expedient to choose your own hour and occasion for attacking him. 'The passage from error to truth,' in the words of Condorcet, 'may be accompanied by certain evils. Every great change necessarily brings some of these in its train; and

though they may be always far below the evil you are for destroying, yet it ought to do what is possible to diminish them. It is not enough to do good; one must do it in a good way. No doubt we should destroy all errors, but as it is impossible to destroy them all in an instant, we should imitate a prudent architect who, when obliged to destroy a building, and knowing how its parts are united together, sets about its demolition in such a way as to prevent its fall from being dangerous.'[1]

[1] In 1779 the Academy of Prussia announced this as the question for their annual prize essay:—'*S'il est utile au peuple d'être trompé.*' They received thirty-three essays; twenty showing that it is not useful, thirteen showing that it is. The Academy, with an impartiality that caused much amusement in Paris and Berlin, awarded two prizes, one to the best proof of the negative answer, another to the best proof of the affirmative. See Bartholmess, *Hist. Philosophique de l'Académie de Prusse*, i. 231, and ii. 273. Condorcet did not actually compete for the prize, but he wrote a very acute piece, suggested by the theme, which was printed in 1790. *Œuv.* v. 343.

To illustrate the common fact of certain currents of thought being in the air at given times, we may mention that in 1770 was published the posthumous work of another Frenchman, Chesneau du Marsais (1676-1756) entitled:—'*Essai sur les Préjugés; ou de l'influence des Opinions sur les Mœurs et sur le Bonheur des Hommes.*' The principal

Those, let us note by the way, who are accustomed to think the moral tone of the eighteenth century low and gross compared with that of the nineteenth, may usefully contrast these just and prudent words of caution in extirpating error, with M. Renan's invitation to men whom he considers wrong in their interpretation of religion, to plant their error as widely and deeply as they can; and who are moreover themselves supposed to be demoralised, or else they would not be likely to acquiesce in a previous surrender of the universities to men whom they think in mortal error. Apart however from M. Renan, Condorcet's words merely assert the duty of setting to work to help on the change from false to true opinions with prudence, and this every sensible man admits. Our position is that in estimating the situation, in counting up and balancing the expediencies of an attack upon error at this or that point, nothing is to be set to the credit of error as such, nor is there anything

prejudices to which he refers are classed under Antiquity—Ancestry—Native Country—Religion—Respect for Wealth. Some of the reasoning is almost verbally identical with Condorcet's. For an account of Du Marsais, see D'Alembert, *Œuv.* iii. 481.

in its own operations or effects to entitle it to a moment's respite. Every one would admit this at once in the case of physical truths, though there are those who say that some of the time spent in the investigation of physical truths might be more advantageously devoted to social problems. But in the case of moral and religious truths or errors, people, if they admit that nothing is to be set to the credit of error as such, still constantly have a subtle and practically mischievous confusion in their minds between the possible usefulness of error, and the possible expediency of leaving it temporarily undisturbed. What happens in consequence of such a confusion is this. Men leave error undisturbed, because they accept in a loose way the proposition that a belief may be 'morally useful without being intellectually sustainable.' They disguise their own dissent from popular opinions, because they regard such opinions as useful to other people. We are not now discussing the case of those who embrace a creed for themselves, on the ground that, though they cannot demonstrate its truth to the understanding, yet they find it pregnant with moralising and elevating

characteristics. We are thinking of a very different attitude—that, namely, of persons who believe a creed to be not more morally useful than it is intellectually sustainable, so far as they themselves are concerned. To them it is pure and uncompensated error. Yet from a vague and general idea that what is useless error to them may be useful to others, they insist on doing their best to perpetuate the system which spreads and consecrates the error. And how do they settle the question? They reckon up the advantages, and forget the drawbacks. They detect and dwell on one or two elements of utility in the false belief or the worn-out institution, and leave out of all account the elements that make in the other direction.

Considering how much influence this vague persuasion has in encouraging a well-meaning hypocrisy in individuals, and a profound stagnation in societies, it may be well to examine the matter somewhat generally. Let us try to measure the force of some of the most usual pleas for error.

I. A false opinion, it may be said, is frequently found to have clustering around it a multitude of excellent associations, which do far more good than

the false opinion that supports them does harm. In the middle ages, for instance, there was a belief that a holy man had the gift of routing demons, of healing the sick, and of working divers other miracles. Supposing that this belief was untrue, supposing that it was an error to attribute the sudden death of an incredible multitude of troublesome flies in a church to the fact of Saint Bernard having excommunicated them, what then? The mistaken opinion was still associated with a deep reverence for virtue and sanctity, and this was more valuable, than the error of the explanation of the death of the flies was noxious or degrading.

The answer to this seems to be as follows. First, in making false notions the proofs or close associates of true ones, you are exposing the latter to the ruin which awaits the former. For example, if you have in the minds of children or servants associated honesty, industry, truthfulness, with the fear of hell-fire, then supposing this fear to become extinct in their minds,—which, being unfounded in truth, it is in constant risk of doing—the virtues associated with it are likely to be weakened exactly in proportion as that association was strong.

Second, for all good habits in thought or conduct there are good and real reasons in the nature of things. To leave such habits attached to false opinions is to lessen the weight of these natural or spontaneous reasons, and so to do more harm in the long run than effacement of them seems for a time to do good. Most excellences in human character have a spontaneous root in our nature. Moreover if they had not, and where they have not, there is always a valid and real external defence for them. The unreal defence must be weaker than the real one, and the substitution of a weak for a strong defence, where both are to be had, is not useful but the very opposite.

II. It is true, the objector would probably continue, that there is a rational defence for all excellences of conduct, as there is for all that is worthy and fitting in institutions. But the force of a rational defence lies in the rationality of the man to whom it is proffered. The arguments which persuade one trained in scientific habits of thought, only touch persons of the same kind. Character is not all pure reason. That fitness of things which you pronounce to be the foundation of good habits,

may be borne in upon men, and may speak to them, through other channels than the syllogism. You assume a community of highly-trained wranglers and proficient sophisters. The plain fact is that, for the mass of men, use and wont, rude or gracious symbols, blind custom, prejudices, superstitions,—however erroneous in themselves, however inadequate to the conveyance of the best truth,—are the only safe guardians of the common virtues. In this sense, then, error may have its usefulness.

A hundred years ago this apology for error was met by those high-minded and interesting men, the French believers in human perfectibility, with their characteristic dogma,—of which Rousseau was the ardent expounder,—that man is born with a clear and unsophisticated spirit, perfectly able to discern all the simple truths necessary for common conduct by its own unaided light. His motives are all pure and unselfish and his intelligence is unclouded, until priests and tyrants mutilate the one and corrupt the other. We who have the benefit of the historic method, and have to take into account the medium that surrounds a human creature the moment it comes into the world, to say nothing of

all the inheritance from the past which it brings within it into the world at the same moment, cannot take up this ground. We cannot maintain that everybody is born with light enough to see the rational defences of things for himself, without the education of institutions. What we do maintain is—and this is the answer to the plea for error at present under consideration—that whatever impairs the brightness of such light as a man has, is not useful but hurtful. Our reply to those who contend for the usefulness of error on the ground of the comparative impotence of rationality over ordinary minds, is something of this kind. Superstition, blind obedience to custom, and the other substitutes for a right and independent use of the mind, may accidentally and in some few respects impress good ideas upon persons who are too darkened to accept these ideas on their real merits. But then superstition itself is the main cause of this very darkness. To hold error is in so far to foster erroneous ways of thinking on all subjects; is to make the intelligence less and less ready to receive truth in all matters whatever. Men are made incapable of perceiving the rational defences,

and of feeling rational motives, for good habits,—so far as they are thus incapable,—by the very errors which we are asked silently to countenance as useful substitutes for right reason. 'Erroneous motives,' as Condorcet has expressed this matter, 'have an additional drawback attached to them, the habit which they strengthen of reasoning ill. The more important the subject on which you reason ill, and the more you busy yourself about it, by so much the more dangerous do the influences of such a habit become. It is especially on subjects analogous to that on which you reason wrongly, or which you connect with it by habit, that such a defect extends most powerfully and most rapidly. Hence it is extremely hard for the man who believes himself obliged to conform in his conduct to what he considers truths useful to men, but who attributes the obligation to erroneous motives, to reason very correctly on the truths themselves; the more attention he pays to such motives, and the more importance he comes to attach to them, the more likely he will be to go wrong.'[1] So, in short, superstition does an immense harm by en-

[1] *Œuv.* v. 354.

feebling rational ways of thinking; it does a little good by accidentally endorsing rational conclusions in one or two matters. And yet, though the evil which it is said to repair is a trifle beside the evil which it is admitted to inflict, the balance of expediencies is after all declared to be such as to warrant us in calling errors useful!

III. A third objection now presents itself to me, which I wish to state as strongly as possible. 'Even if a false opinion cannot in itself be more useful than a true one, whatever good habits may seem to be connected with it, yet,' it may be contended, 'relatively to the general mental attitude of a set of men, to their other notions and maxims, the false opinion may entail less harm than would be wrought by its mere demolition. There are false opinions so intimately bound up with the whole way of thinking and feeling, that to introduce one or two detached true opinions in their stead, would, even if it were possible, only serve to break up that coherency of character and conduct which it is one of the chief objects of moralists and the great art of living to produce. For a true opinion does not necessarily bring in its train all

the other true opinions that are logically connected with it. On the contrary, it is only too notorious a fact in the history of belief, that not merely individuals but whole societies are capable of holding at one and the same time contradictory opinions and mutually destructive principles. On the other hand, neither does a false opinion involve practically all the evil consequences deducible from it. For the results of human inconsistency are not all unhappy, and if we do not always act up to virtuous principle, no more do we always work out to its remotest inference every vicious principle. Not insincerity, but inconsistency, has constantly turned the adherents of persecuting precepts into friends of tolerant practice.'

'It is a comparatively small thing to persuade a superstitious person to abandon this or that article of his superstition. You have no security that the rejection of the one article which you have displaced will lead to the rejection of any other, and it is quite possible that it may lead to all the more fervid an adhesion to what remains behind. Error, therefore, in view of such considerations may surely be allowed to have at least a provisional utility.'

Now undoubtedly the repudiation of error is not at all the same thing as embracing truth. People are often able to see the force of arguments that destroy a given opinion, without being able to see the force of arguments for the positive opinion that ought to replace it. They can only be quite sure of seeing both, when they have acquired not merely a conviction that one notion is false and another true, but have furthermore exchanged a generally erroneous way of thinking for a generally correct way. Hence the truly important object with every one who holds opinions which he deems it of the highest moment that others should accept, must obviously be to reach people's general ways of thinking; to stir their love of truth; to penetrate them with a sense of the difference in the quality of evidence; to make them willing to listen to criticism and new opinion; and perhaps above all to teach them to take ungrudging and daily trouble to clear up in their minds the exact sense of the terms they use.

If this be so, a false opinion, like an erroneous motive, can hardly have even a provisional usefulness. For how can you attack an erroneous way

of thinking except in detail, that is to say through the sides of this or that single wrong opinion? Each of these wrong opinions is an illustration and type, as it is a standing support and abettor, of some kind of wrong reasoning, though they are not all on the same scale nor all of them equally instructive. It is precisely by this method of gradual displacement of error step by step, that the few stages of progress which the race has yet traversed, have been actually achieved. Even if the place of the erroneous idea is not immediately taken by the corresponding true one, or by the idea which is at least one or two degrees nearer to the true one, still the removal of error in this purely negative way amounts to a positive gain. Why? For the excellent reason that it is the removal of a bad element which otherwise tends to propagate itself, or even if it fails to do that, tends at the best to make the surrounding mass of error more inveterate. All error is what physiologists term fissiparous, and in exterminating one false opinion you may be hindering the growth of an uncounted brood of false opinions.

Then as to the maintenance of that coherency,

interdependence, and systematisation of opinions and motives, which is said to make character organic, and is therefore so highly prized by some schools of thought. No doubt the loosening of this or that part of the fabric of heterogeneous origin, which constitutes the character of a man or woman, tends to loosen the whole. But do not let us feed ourselves upon phrases. This organic coherency, what does it come to? It signifies in a general way, to describe it briefly, a harmony between the intellectual, the moral, and the practical parts of human nature; an undisturbed co-operation between reason, affection, and will; the reason prescribing nothing against which the affections revolt, and proscribing nothing which they crave; and the will obeying the joint impulses of these two directing forces, without liability to capricious or extravagant disturbance of their direction. Well, if the reason were perfect in information and method, and the affections faultless in their impulse, then organic unity of character would be the final consummation of all human improvement, and it would be criminal, even if it were possible, to undermine a structure

of such priceless value. But short of this there can be no value in coherency and harmonious consistency as such. So long as error is an element in it, then for so long the whole product is vitiated. Undeniably and most fortunately, social virtues are found side by side with speculative mistakes and the gravest intellectual imperfections. We may apply to humanity the idea which, as Hebrew students tell us, is imputed in the Talmud to the Supreme Being. *God prays*, the Talmud says; and his prayer is this,—'Be it my will that my mercy overpower my justice.' And so with men, with or without their will, their mercifulness overpowers their logic. And not their mercifulness only, but all their good impulses overpower their logic. To repeat the words which I have put into the objector's mouth, we do not always work out every vicious principle to its remotest inference. What, however, is this but to say that in such cases character is saved, not by its coherency, but by the opposite; to say not that error is useful, but what is a very different thing, that its mischievousness is sometimes capable of being averted or minimised?

The apologist may retort that he did not mean

logical coherency, but a kind of practical every-day coherency, which may be open to a thousand abstract objections, yet which still secures both to the individual and to society a number of advantages that might be endangered by any disturbance of opinion or motive. No doubt, and the method and season of chasing erroneous opinions and motives out of the mind must always be a matter of much careful and far-seeing consideration. Only in the course of such consideration, let us not admit the notion in any form that error can have even provisional utility. For it is not the error which confers the advantages that we desire to preserve, but some true opinion or just motive or high or honest sentiment, which exists and thrives and operates in spite of the error and in face of it, springing from man's spontaneous and unformulated recognition of the real relations of things. This recognition is very faint in the beginnings of society. It grows clearer and firmer with each step forward. And in a tolerably civilised age it has become a force on which you can fairly lean with a considerable degree of assurance.

And this leads to the central point of the

answer to the argument from coherency of conduct. In measuring utility you have to take into account not merely the service rendered to the objects of the present hour, but the contribution to growth, progress, and the future. From this point of view most of the talk about unity of character is not much more than a glorifying of stagnation. It leaves out of sight the conditions necessary for the continuance of the unending task of human improvement. Now whatever ease may be given to an individual or a generation by social or religious error, such error at any rate can conduce nothing to further advancement. That, at least, is not one of its possible utilities.

This is also one of the answers to the following plea. 'Though the knowledge of every positive truth is an useful acquisition, this doctrine cannot without reservation be applied to negative truth. When the only truth ascertainable is that nothing can be known, we do not, by this knowledge, gain any new fact by which to guide ourselves.'[1] But

[1] Mill's *Three Essays on Religion*, p. 73. I have offered some criticisms on the whole passage in *Critical Miscellanies, Second Series*, pp. 300-304.

the negative truth that nothing can be known is in fact a truth that guides us. It leads us away from sterile and irreclaimable tracts of thought and emotion, and so inevitably compels the energies which would otherwise have been wasted, to feel after a more profitable direction. By leaving the old guide-marks undisturbed, you may give ease to an existing generation, but the present ease is purchased at the cost of future growth. To have been deprived of the faith of the old dispensation, is the first condition of strenuous endeavour after the new.

No doubt history abounds with cases in which a false opinion on moral or religious subjects, or an erroneous motive in conduct, has seemed to be a stepping-stone to truth. But this is in no sense a demonstration of the utility of error. For in all such cases the erroneous opinion or motive was far from being wholly erroneous, or wholly without elements of truth and reality. If it helped to quicken the speed or mend the direction of progress, that must have been by virtue of some such elements within it. All that was error in it was pure waste, or worse than waste. It is true that

the religious sentiment has clothed itself in a great number of unworthy, inadequate, depressing, and otherwise misleading shapes, dogmatic and liturgic. Yet on the whole the religious sentiment has conferred enormous benefits on civilisation. This is no proof of the utility of the mistaken direction which these dogmatic or liturgic shapes imposed upon it. On the contrary, the effect of the false dogmas and enervating liturgies is so much that has to be deducted from the advantages conferred by a sentiment in itself valuable and of priceless capability.[1]

Yes, it will be urged, but from the historic conditions of the time, truth could only be conveyed in erroneous forms, and motives of perma-

[1] 'Enfin, supposons pour un instant que le dogme de l'autre vie soit de quelqu'utilité, et qu'il retienne vraiment un petit nombre d'individus, qu'est-ce que ces foibles avantages comparés à la foule de maux que l'on en voir découler? Contre un homme timide que cette idée contient, il en est des millions qu'elle ne peut contenir; il en est des millions qu'elle rend insensés, farouches, fanatiques, inutiles et méchants; il en est des millions qu'elle détourne de leurs devoirs envers la société; il en est une infinité qu'elle afflige et qu'elle trouble, sans aucun bien réel pour leurs associés.' —*Système de la Nature*, i. xiii.

nent price for humanity could only be secured in these mistaken expressions. Here I would again press the point of this necessity for erroneous forms and mistaken expressions being, in a great many of the most important instances, itself derivative, one among other ill consequences of previous moral and religious error. 'It was gravely said,' Bacon tells us, 'by some of the prelates in the Council of Trent, where the doctrines of the Schoolmen have great sway; that the schoolmen were like Astronomers, which did faigne Eccentricks and Epicycles and Engines of Orbs to save the Phenomena; though they knew there were no such Things; and in like manner that the Schoolmen had framed a number of subtile and intricate Axioms and Theorems, to save the practice of the Church.' This is true of much else besides scholastic axioms and theorems. Subordinate error was made necessary and invented, by reason of some pre-existent main stock of error, and to save the practice of the Church. Thus we are often referred to the consolation which this or that doctrine has brought to the human spirit. But what if the same system had produced the

terror which made absence of consolation intolerable? How much of the necessity for expressing the enlarged humanity of the Church in the doctrine of purgatory, arose from the existence of the older unsoftened doctrine of eternal hell?

Again, how much of this alleged necessity of error, as alloy for the too pure metal of sterling truth, is to be explained by the interest which powerful castes or corporations have had in preserving the erroneous forms, even when they could not resist, or did not wish to resist, their impregnation by newer and better doctrine? This interest was not deliberately sinister or malignant. It may be more correctly as well as more charitably explained by that infirmity of human nature, which makes us very ready to believe what it is on other grounds convenient to us to believe. Nobody attributes to pure malevolence the heartiness with which the great corporation of lawyers, for example, resist the removal of superfluous and obstructive forms in their practice; they have come to look on such forms as indispensable safeguards. Hence powerful teachers and preachers of all kinds have been spontaneously inclined to

suppose a necessity, which had no real existence, of preserving as much as was possible of what we know to be error, even while introducing wholesome modification of it. This is the honest, though mischievous, conservatism of the human mind. We have no right to condemn our foregoers; far less to lavish on them the evil names of impostor, charlatan, and brigand, which the zealous unhistoric school of the last century used so profusely. But we have a right to say of them, as we say of those who imitate their policy now, that their conservatism is no additional proof of the utility of error. Least of all is it any justification for those who wish to have impressed upon the people a complete system of religious opinion which men of culture have avowedly put away. And, moreover, the very priests must, I should think, be supposed to have put it away also. Else they would hardly be invited deliberately to abdicate their teaching functions in the very seats where teaching is of the weightiest and most far-spreading influence.

Meanwhile our point is that the reforms in opinion which have been effected on the plan of

pouring the new wine of truth into the old bottles of superstition—though not dishonourable to the sincerity of the reformers—are no testimony to even the temporary usefulness of error. Those who think otherwise do not look far enough in front of the event. They forget the evil wrought by the prolonged duration of the error, to which the added particle of truth may have given new vitality. They overlook the ultimate enervation that is so often the price paid for the temporary exaltation.

Nor, finally, can they know the truths which the error thus prolonged has hindered from coming to the birth. A strenuous disputant has recently asserted against me that 'the region of the *might have been* lies beyond the limits of sane speculation.'[1] It is surely extending optimism too far to insist on carrying it back right through the ages. To me at any rate the history of mankind is a huge *pis-aller*, just as our present society is; a prodigious wasteful experiment, from which a certain number of precious results have been ex-

[1] Sir J. F. Stephen's *Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity*, 2d ed., p. 19, *note*.

tracted, but which is not now, nor ever has been at any other time, a final measure of all the possibilities of the time. This is not inconsistent with the scientific conception of history; it is not to deny the great law that society has a certain order of progress; but only to urge that within that, the only possible order, there is always room for all kinds and degrees of invention, improvement, and happy or unhappy accident. There is no discoverable law fixing precisely the more or the less of these; nor how much of each of them a community shall meet with, nor exactly when it shall meet with them. We have to distinguish between possibility and necessity. Only certain steps in advance are possible at a given time; but it is not inevitable that these potential advances should all be realised. Does anybody suppose that humanity has had the profit of all the inventive and improving capacity born into the world? That Turgot, for example, was the only man that ever lived who might have done more for society than he was allowed to do, and spared society a cataclysm? No,—history is a *pis-aller*. It has assuredly not moved without the relation

of cause and effect; it is a record of social growth and its conditions; but it is also a record of interruption and misadventure and perturbation. You trace the long chain which has made us what we are in this aspect and that. But where are the dropped links that might have made all the difference? *Ubi sunt eorum tabulæ qui post vota nuncupata perierunt?* Where is the fruit of those multitudinous gifts which came into the world in untimely seasons? We accept the past for the same reason that we accept the laws of the solar system, though, as Comte says, 'we can easily conceive them improved in certain respects.' The past, like the solar system, is beyond reach of modification at our hands, and we cannot help it But it is surely the mere midsummer madness of philosophic complacency to think that we have come by the shortest and easiest of all imaginable routes to our present point in the march; to suppose that we have wasted nothing, lost nothing, cruelly destroyed nothing, on the road. What we have lost is all in the region of the 'might have been,' and we are justified in taking this into account, and thinking much of it, and in trying

to find causes for the loss. One of them has been want of liberty for the human intelligence; and another, to return to our proper subject, has been the prolonged existence of superstition, of false opinions, and of attachment to gross symbols, beyond the time when they might have been successfully attacked, and would have fallen into decay but for the mistaken political notion of their utility. In making a just estimate of this utility, if we see reason to believe that these false opinions, narrow superstitions, gross symbols, have been an impediment to the free exercise of the intelligence and a worthier culture of the emotions, then we are justified in placing the unknown loss as a real and most weighty item in the account against them.

In short, then, the utmost that can be said on behalf of errors in opinion and motive, is that they are inevitable elements in human growth. But the inevitable does not coincide with the useful. Pain can be avoided by none of the sons of men, yet the horrible and uncompensated subtraction which it makes from the value and usefulness of human life, is one of the most formidable obstacles

to the smoother progress of the world. And as with pain, so with error. The moral of our contention has reference to the temper in which practically we ought to regard false doctrine and ill-directed motive. It goes to show that if we have satisfied ourselves on good grounds that the doctrine is false, or the motive ill directed, then the only question that we need ask ourselves turns solely upon the possibility of breaking it up and dispersing it, by methods compatible with the doctrine of liberty. Any embarrassment in dealing with it, due to a semi-latent notion that it may be useful to some one else is a weakness that hinders social progress.

CHAPTER III.

INTELLECTUAL RESPONSIBILITY AND THE POLITICAL SPIRIT.

We have been considering the position of those who would fain divide the community into two great castes; the one of thoughtful and instructed persons using their minds freely, but guarding their conclusions in strict reserve; the other of the illiterate or unreflecting, who should have certain opinions and practices taught them, not because they are true or are really what their votaries are made to believe them to be, but because the intellectual superiors of the community think the inculcation of such a belief useful in all cases save their own. Nor is this a mere theory. On the contrary, it is a fair description of an existing state of things. We have the old *disciplina arcani* among us in as full force as in the primitive church, but with an all-important difference. The

Christian fathers practised reserve for the sake of leading the acolyte the more surely to the fulness of truth. The modern economiser keeps back his opinions, or dissembles the grounds of them, for the sake of leaving his neighbours the more at their ease in the peaceful sloughs of prejudice and superstition and low ideals. We quote Saint Paul when he talked of making himself all things to all men, and of becoming to the Jews a Jew, and as without the Law to the heathen. But then we do so with a view to justifying ourselves for leaving the Jew to remain a Jew, and the heathen to remain heathen. We imitate the same apostle in accepting old time-worn altars dedicated to the Unknown God. We forget that he made the ancient symbol the starting-point of a revolutionised doctrine. There is, as anybody can see, a whole world of difference between the reserve of sagacious apostleship, on the one hand, dealing tenderly with scruple and fearfulness and fine sensibility of conscience, and the reserve of intellectual cowardice on the other hand, dealing hypocritically with narrow minds in the supposed interests of social peace and quietness. The old *disciplina arcani*

signified the disclosure of a little light with a view to the disclosure of more. The new means the dissimulation of truth with a view to the perpetuation of error. Consider the difference between these two fashions of compromise, in their effects upon the mind and character of the person compromising. The one is fully compatible with fervour and hopefulness and devotion to great causes. The other stamps a man with artifice, and hinders the free eagerness of his vision, and wraps him about with mediocrity,—not always of understanding, but that still worse thing, mediocrity of aspiration and purpose.

The coarsest and most revolting shape which the doctrine of conformity can assume, and its degrading consequences to the character of the conformer, may be conveniently illustrated by a passage in the life of Hume. He looked at things in a more practical manner than would find favour with the sentimental champions of compromise in nearer times. There is a well-known letter of Hume's, in which he recommends a young man to become a clergyman, on the ground that it was very hard to get any tolerable civil employment,

and that as Lord Bute was then all powerful, his friend would be certain of preferment. In answer to the young man's scruples as to the Articles and the rest, Hume says :—

'It is putting too great a respect on the vulgar and their superstitions to pique one's self on sincerity with regard to them. If the thing were worthy of being treated gravely, I should tell him [the young man] that the Pythian oracle with the approbation of Xenophon advised every one to worship the gods—*νόμῳ πόλεως*. I wish it were still in my power to be a hypocrite in this particular. The common duties of society usually require it; and the ecclesiastical profession only adds a little more to an innocent dissimulation, or rather simulation, without which it is impossible to pass through the world.'[1]

This is a singularly straightforward way of stating a view which silently influences a much greater number of men than it is pleasant to think of. They would shrink from throwing their conduct into so gross a formula. They will lift up their hands at this quotation, so strangely blind

[1] Burton's *Life of Hume*, ii. 186-188.

are we to the hiding-places of our own hearts, even when others flash upon them the terrible illumination that comes of calling conduct and motives by plain names. Now it is not merely the moral improbity of these cases which revolts us—the improbity of making in solemn form a number of false statements for the sake of earning a livelihood; of saying in order to get money or social position that you accept a number of propositions which in fact you utterly reject; of declaring expressly that you trust you are inwardly moved to take upon you this office and ministration by the Holy Ghost, when the real motive is a desire not to miss the chance of making something out of the Earl of Bute. This side of such dissimulation is shocking enough. And it is not any more shocking to the most devout believer than it is to people who doubt whether there be any Holy Ghost or not. Those who no longer place their highest faith in powers above and beyond men, are for that very reason more deeply interested than others in cherishing the integrity and worthiness of man himself. Apart, however, from the immorality of such

reasoned hypocrisy, which no man with a particle of honesty will attempt to blink, there is the intellectual improbity which it brings in its train, the infidelity to truth, the disloyalty to one's own intelligence. Gifts of understanding are numbed and enfeebled in a man, who has once played such a trick with his own conscience as to persuade himself that, because the vulgar are superstitious, it is right for the learned to earn money by turning themselves into the ministers and accomplices of superstition. If he is clever enough to see through the vulgar and their beliefs, he is tolerably sure to be clever enough from time to time and in his better moments to see through himself. He begins to suspect himself of being an impostor. That suspicion gradually unmans him when he comes to use his mind in the sphere of his own enlightenment. One of really superior power cannot escape these better moments and the remorse that they bring. As he advances in life, as his powers ought to be coming to fuller maturity and his intellectual productiveness to its prime, just in the same degree the increasing seriousness of life multiplies such moments and

deepens their remorse, and so the light of intellectual promise slowly goes out in impotent endeavour, or else in taking comfort that much goods are laid up, or, what is deadliest of all, in a soulless cynicism.

We do not find out until it is too late that the intellect too, at least where it is capable of being exercised on the higher objects, has its sensitiveness. It loses its colour and potency and finer fragrance in an atmosphere of mean purpose and low conception of the sacredness of fact and reality. Who has not observed inferior original power achieving greater results even in the intellectual field itself, where the superior understanding happens to have been unequally yoked with a self-seeking character, ever scenting the expedient? If Hume had been in the early productive part of his life the hypocrite which he wished it were in his power to show himself in its latter part, we may be tolerably sure that European philosophy would have missed one of its foremost figures. It has been often said that he who begins life by stifling his convictions is in a fair way for ending it without any convictions to stifle. We

may, perhaps, add that he who sets out with the notion that the difference between truth and falsehood is a thing of no concern to the vulgar, is very likely sooner or later to come to the kindred notion that it is not a thing of any supreme concern to himself.

Let thus much have been said as to those who deliberately and knowingly sell their intellectual birthright for a mess of pottage, making a brazen compromise with what they hold despicable, lest they should have to win their bread honourably. Men need to expend no declamatory indignation upon them. They have a hell of their own; words can add no bitterness to it. It is no light thing to have secured a livelihood on condition of going through life masked and gagged. To be compelled, week after week, and year after year, to recite the symbols of ancient faith and lift up his voice in the echoes of old hopes, with the blighting thought in his soul that the faith is a lie, and the hope no more than the folly of the crowd; to read hundreds of times in a twelvemonth with solemn unction as the inspired word of the Supreme what to him are meaningless as the

Abracadabras of the conjuror in a booth; to go on to the end of his days administering to simple folk holy rites of commemoration and solace, when he has in his mind at each phrase what dupes are these simple folk and how wearisomely counterfeit their rites: and to know through all that this is really to be the one business of his prostituted life, that so dreary and hateful a piece of play-acting will make the desperate retrospect of his last hours —of a truth here is the very *βδέλυγμα τῆς ἐρημώσεως*, the abomination of desolation of the human spirit indeed.

No one will suppose that this is designed for the normal type of priest. But it is well to study tendencies in their extreme catastrophe. This is only the catastrophe, in one of its many shapes, of the fatal doctrine that money, position, power, philanthropy, or any of the thousand seductive masks of the pseudo-expedient, may carry a man away from love of truth and yet leave him internally unharmed. The depravation that follows the trucking for money of intellectual freedom and self-respect, attends in its degree each other departure from disinterested following of truth,

and each other substitution of convenience, whether public or private, in its place. And both parties to such a compromise are losers. The world which offers gifts and tacitly undertakes to ask no questions as to the real state of the timeserver's inner mind, loses no less than the timeserver himself who receives the gifts and promises to hold his peace. It is as though a society placed penalties on mechanical inventions and the exploration of new material resources, and offered bounties for the steadiest adherence to all ancient processes in culture and production. The injury to wealth in the one case would not be any deeper than the injury to morality is in the other.

To pass on to less sinister forms of this abnegation of intellectual responsibility. In the opening sentences of the first chapter we spoke of a wise suspense in forming opinions, a wise reserve in expressing them, and a wise tardiness in trying to realise them. Thus we meant to mark out the three independent provinces of compromise, each of them being the subject of considerations that either do not apply at all to the other two, or else

apply in a different degree. Disingenuousness or self-illusion, arising from a depressing deference to the existing state of things, or to what is immediately practicable, or to what other people would think of us if they knew our thoughts, is the result of compromising truth in the matter of forming and holding opinions. Secondly, positive simulation is what comes of an unlawful willingness to compromise in the matter of avowing and publishing them. Finally, pusillanimity or want of faith is the vice that belongs to unlawful compromise in the department of action and realisation. This is not merely a division arranged for convenience of discussion. It goes to the root of conduct and character, and is the key to the present mood of our society. It is always a hardy thing to attempt to throw a complex matter into very simple form, but we should say that the want of energy and definiteness in contemporary opinions, of which we first complained, is due mainly to the following notion; that if a subject is not ripe for practical treatment, you and I are therefore entirely relieved from the duty of having clear ideas about it. If the majority cling to an opinion, why should we

ask whether that is the sound and right opinion or the reverse? Now this notion, which springs from a confusion of the three fields of compromise with one another, quietly reigns almost without dispute. The devotion to the practical aspect of truth is in such excess, as to make people habitually deny that it can be worth while to form an opinion, when it happens at the moment to be incapable of realisation, for the reason that there is no direct prospect of inducing a sufficient number of persons to share it. 'We are quite willing to think that your view is the right one, and would produce all the improvements for which you hope; but then there is not the smallest chance of persuading the only persons able to carry out such a view; why therefore discuss it?' No talk is more familiar to us than this. As if the mere possibility of the view being a right one did not obviously entitle it to discussion; discussion being the only process by which people are likely to be induced to accept it, or else to find good grounds for finally dismissing it.

It is precisely because we believe that opinion, and nothing but opinion, can effect great perma-

nent changes, that we ought to be careful to keep this most potent force honest, wholesome, fearless, and independent. Take the political field. Politicians and newspapers almost systematically refuse to talk about a new idea, which is not capable of being at once embodied in a bill, and receiving the royal assent before the following August. There is something rather contemptible, seen from the ordinary standards of intellectual integrity, in the position of a minister who waits to make up his mind whether a given measure, say the disestablishment of the Irish Church, is in itself and on the merits desirable, until the official who runs diligently up and down the backstairs of the party, tells him that the measure is practicable and required in the interests of the band. On the one hand, a leader is lavishly panegyrised for his highmindedness, in suffering himself to be driven into his convictions by his party. On the other, a party is extolled for its political tact, in suffering itself to be forced out of its convictions by its leader. It is hard to decide which is the more discreditable and demoralising sight. The education of chiefs by followers, and of followers by

chiefs, into the abandonment in a month of the traditions of centuries or the principles of a lifetime may conduce to the rapid and easy working of the machine. It certainly marks a triumph of the political spirit which the author of *The Prince* might have admired. It is assuredly mortal to habits of intellectual self-respect in the society which allows itself to be amused by the cajolery and legerdemain and self-sophistication of its rulers.

Of course there are excellent reasons why a statesman immersed in the actual conduct of affairs should confine his attention to the work which his hands find to do. But the fact that leading statesmen are of necessity so absorbed in the tasks of the hour furnishes all the better reason why as many other people as possible should busy themselves in helping to prepare opinion for the practical application of unfamiliar but weighty and promising suggestions, by constant and ready discussion of them upon their merits. As a matter of fact it is not the men most occupied who are usually most deaf to new ideas. It is the loungers of politics, the quidnuncs, gossips, bustling idlers, who are most industrious in stifling discussion by protests

against the waste of time and the loss of force involved in talking about proposals which are not exactly ready to be voted on. As it is, everybody knows that questions are inadequately discussed, or often not discussed at all, on the ground that the time is not yet come for their solution. Then when some unforeseen perturbation, or the natural course of things, forces on the time for their solution, they are settled in a slovenly, imperfect, and often downright vicious manner, from the fact that opinion has not been prepared for solving them in an efficient and perfect manner. The so-called settlement of the question of national education is the most recent and most deplorable illustration of what comes of refusing to examine ideas alleged to be impracticable. Perhaps we may venture to prophesy that the disendowment of the national church will supply the next illustration on an imposing scale. Gratuitous primary instruction, and the redistribution of electoral power, are other matters of signal importance, which comparatively few men will consent to discuss seriously and patiently, and for our indifference to which we shall one day surely smart. A judicious and cool

writer has said that 'an opinion gravely professed by a man of sense and education demands always respectful consideration—demands and actually receives it from those whose own sense and education give them a correlative right; and whoever offends against this sort of courtesy may fairly be deemed to have forfeited the privileges it secures.'[1] That is the least part of the matter. The serious mischief is the eventual miscarriage and loss and prodigal waste of good ideas.

The evil of which we have been speaking comes of not seeing the great truth, that it is worth while to take pains to find out the best way of doing a given task, even if you have strong grounds for suspecting that it will ultimately be done in a worse way. And so also in spheres of thought away from the political sphere, it is worth while 'to scorn delights and live laborious days' in order to make as sure as we can of having the best opinion, even if we know that this opinion has an infinitely small chance of being speedily or ever accepted by the majority, or by anybody but ourselves. Truth and wisdom have to bide

[1] Isaac Taylor's *Natural History of Enthusiasm*, p. 226.

their time, and then take their chance after all. The most that the individual can do is to seek them for himself, even if he seek alone. And if it is the most, it is also the least. Yet in our present mood we seem not to feel this. We misunderstand the considerations which should rightly lead us in practice to surrender some of what we desire, in order to secure the rest; and rightly make us acquiesce in a second-best course of action, in order to avoid stagnation or retrogression. We misunderstand all this, and go on to suppose that there are the same grounds why we should in our own minds acquiesce in second-best opinions; why we should mix a little alloy of conventional expression with the too fine ore of conviction; why we should adopt beliefs that we suspect in our hearts to be of more than equivocal authenticity, but into whose antecedents we do not greatly care to inquire, because they stand so well with the general public. This is compromise or economy or management of the first of the three kinds of which we are talking. It is economy applied to the formation of opinion; compromise or management in making up one's mind.

The lawfulness or expediency of it turns mainly, as with the other two kinds of compromise, upon the relative rights of the majority and the minority, and upon the respect which is owing from the latter to the former. It is a very easy thing for people endowed with the fanatical temperament, or demoralised by the habit of looking at society exclusively from the juridical point of view, to insist that no respect at all, except the respect that arises from being too weak to have your own way, is due from either to the other. This shallow and mischievous notion rests either on a misinterpretation of the experience of civilised societies, or else on nothing more creditable than an arbitrary and unreflecting temper. Those who have thought most carefully and disinterestedly about the matter, are agreed that in advanced societies the expedient course is that no portion of the community should insist on imposing its own will upon any other portion, except in matters which are vitally connected with the maintenance of the social union. The question where this vital connection begins is open to much discussion. The line defining the sphere of legitimate

interference may be drawn variously, whether at self-regarding acts, or in some other condition and element of conduct. Wherever this line may be best taken, not only abstract speculation, but the practical and spontaneous tact of the world, has decided that there are limits, alike in the interest of majority and minority, to the rights of either to disturb the other. In other words, it is expedient in certain affairs that the will of the majority should be absolutely binding, while in affairs of a different order it should count for nothing, or as nearly nothing, as the sociable dependence of a man on his fellows will permit.

Our thesis is this. In the positive endeavour to realise an opinion, to convert a theory into practice, it may be, and very often is, highly expedient to defer to the prejudices of the majority, to move very slowly, to bow to the conditions of the *status quo*, to practise the very utmost sobriety, self-restraint, and conciliatoriness. The mere expression of opinion, in the next place, the avowal of dissent from received notions, the refusal to conform to language which implies the acceptance of such notions,—this rests on a different footing.

Here the reasons for respecting the wishes and sentiments of the majority are far less strong, though, as we shall presently see, such reasons certainly exist, and will weigh with all well-considering men. Finally, in the formation of an opinion as to the abstract preferableness of one course of action over another, or as to the truth or falsehood or right significance of a proposition, the fact that the majority of one's contemporaries lean in the other direction is naught, and no more than dust in the balance. In making up our minds as to what would be the wisest line of policy if it were practicable, we have nothing to do with the circumstance that it is not practicable. And in settling with ourselves whether propositions purporting to state matters of fact are true or not, we have to consider how far they are conformable to the evidence. We have nothing to do with the comfort and solace which they would be likely to bring to others or ourselves, if they were taken as true.

A nominal assent to this truth will be instantly given even by those who in practice systematically disregard it. The difficulty of transforming that

nominal assent into a reality is enormous in such a community as ours. Of all societies since the Roman Republic, and not even excepting the Roman Republic, England has been the most emphatically and essentially political. She has passed through military phases and through religious phases, but they have been transitory, and the great central stream of national life has flowed in political channels. The political life has been stronger than any other, deeper, wider, more persistent, more successful. The wars which built up our far-spreading empire were not waged with designs of military conquest; they were mostly wars for a market. The great spiritual emancipation of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries figures in our history partly as an accident, partly as an intrigue, partly as a raid of nobles in search of spoil. It was hardly until the reformed doctrine became associated with analogous ideas and corresponding precepts in government, that people felt at home with it, and became really interested in it.

One great tap-root of our national increase has been the growth of self-government, or government by deliberative bodies, representing opposed

principles and conflicting interests. With the system of self-government has grown the habit—not of tolerance precisely, for Englishmen when in earnest are as little in love with tolerance as Frenchmen or any other people, but—of giving way to the will of the majority, so long as they remain a majority. This has come to pass for the simple reason that, on any other terms, the participation of large numbers of people in the control and arrangement of public affairs immediately becomes unworkable. The gradual concentration of power in the hands of a supreme deliberative body, the active share of so many thousands of persons in choosing and controlling its members, the close attention with which the proceedings of parliament are followed and watched, the kind of dignity that has been lent to parliamentary methods by the great importance of the transactions, have all tended in the same direction. They have all helped both to fix our strongest and most constant interests upon politics, and to ingrain the mental habits proper to politics, far more deeply than any other, into our general constitution and inmost character.

Thus the political spirit has grown to be the strongest element in our national life; the dominant force, extending its influence over all our ways of thinking in matters that have least to do with politics, or even nothing at all to do with them. There has thus been engendered among us the real sense of political responsibility. In a corresponding degree has been discouraged, what it is the object of the present chapter to urge, the sense of intellectual responsibility. If it were inevitable that one of these two should always enfeeble or exclude the other, if the price of the mental alacrity and open-mindedness of the age of Pericles must always be paid in the political incompetence of the age of Demosthenes, it would be hard to settle which quality ought to be most eagerly encouraged by those who have most to do with the spiritual direction of a community. No doubt the tone of a long-enduring and imperial society, such as Rome was, must be conservative, drastic, positive, hostile to the death to every speculative novelty. But then, after all, the permanence of Roman power was only valuable to mankind because it ensured the spread of certain

civilising ideas. And these ideas had originated among people so characteristically devoid of the sovereign faculty of political coherency as were the Greeks and the Jews. In the Greeks, it is true, we find not only ideas of the highest speculative fertility, but actual political institutions. Still we should hardly point to Greek history for the most favourable examples of their stable working. Practically and as a matter of history, a society is seldom at the same time successfully energetic both in temporals and spirituals; seldom prosperous alike in seeking abstract truth and nursing the political spirit. There is a decisive preponderance in one direction or the other, and the equal balance between free and active thinking, and coherent practical energy in a community, seems too hard to sustain. The vast military and political strength of Germany, for instance, did not exist, and was scarcely anticipated in men's minds, during the time of her most strenuous passion for abstract truth and deeper learning and new criticism. In France never was political and national interest so debilitated, so extinct, as it was during the reign of Lewis the Fifteenth: her

intellectual interest was never so vivid, so fruitful, or so widely felt.

Yet it is at least well, and more than that, it is an indispensable condition of social wellbeing, that the divorce between political responsibility and intellectual responsibility, between respect for what is instantly practicable and search after what is only important in thought, should not be too complete and universal. Even if there were no other objection, the undisputed predominance of the political spirit has a plain tendency to limit the subjects in which the men animated by it can take a real interest. All matters fall out of sight, or at least fall into a secondary place, which do not bear more or less directly and patently upon the material and structural welfare of the community. In this way the members of the community miss the most bracing, widening, and elevated of the whole range of influences that create great characters. First, they lose sincere concern about the larger questions which the human mind has raised up for itself. Second, they lose a fearless desire to reach the true answers to them, or if no certain answers should prove to

be within reach, then at any rate to be satisfied on good grounds that this is so. Such questions are not immediately discerned by commonplace minds to be of social import. Consequently they, and all else that is not obviously connected with the machinery of society, give way in the public consideration to what is so connected with it, in a manner that cannot be mistaken.

Again, even minds that are not commonplace are affected for the worse by the same spirit. They are aware of the existence of the great speculative subjects and of their importance, but the pressure of the political spirit on such men makes them afraid of the conclusions to which free inquiry might bring them. Accordingly they abstain from inquiry, and dread nothing so much as making up their minds. They see reasons for thinking that, if they applied themselves seriously to the formation of true opinions in this or that department, they would come to conclusions which, though likely to make their way in the course of some centuries, are wholly unpopular now, and which might ruin the influence of anybody suspected of accepting, or even of so much as leaning

towards, them. Life, they reflect, is short; missionaries do not pass for a very agreeable class, nor martyrs for a very sensible class; one can only do a trifling amount of good in the world, at best; it is moral suicide to throw away any chance of achieving even that trifle; and therefore it is best not only not to express, but not to take the trouble to acquire, right views in this quarter or that, and to draw clear away from such or such a region of thought, for the sake of keeping peace on earth and superficial good will among men.

It would be too harsh to stigmatise such a train of thought as self-seeking and hypocritical. It is the natural product of the political spirit, which is incessantly thinking of present consequences and the immediately feasible. There is nothing in the mere dread of losing it, to hinder influence from being well employed, so far as it goes. But one can hardly overrate the ill consequences of this particular kind of management, this unspoken bargaining with the little circle of his fellows which constitutes the world of a man. If he may retain his place among them as preacher or teacher, he is willing to forego his birthright of free explan-

ation; he consents to be blind to the duty which attaches to every intelligent man of having some clear ideas, even though only provisional ones, upon the greatest subjects of human interest, and of deliberately preferring these, whatever they may be, to their opposites. Either an individual or a community is fatally dwarfed by any such limitation of the field in which one is free to use his mind. For it is a limitation, not prescribed by absorption in one set of subjects rather than another, nor by insufficient preparation for the discussion of certain subjects, nor by indolence nor incuriousness, but solely by apprehension of the conclusions to which such use of the mind might bring the too courageous seeker. If there were no other ill effect, this kind of limitation would at least have the radical disadvantage of dulling the edge of responsibility, of deadening the sharp sense of personal answerableness either to a God, or to society, or to a man's own conscience and intellectual self-respect.

How momentous a disadvantage this is, we can best know by contemplating the characters which have sometimes lighted up the old times. Men

were then devoutly persuaded that their eternal salvation depended on their having true beliefs. Any slackness in finding out which beliefs are the true ones would have to be answered for before the throne of Almighty God, at the sure risk and peril of everlasting damnation. To what quarter in the large historic firmament can we turn our eyes with such certainty of being stirred and elevated, of thinking better of human life and the worth of those who have been most deeply penetrated by its seriousness, as to the annals of the intrepid spirits whom the protestant doctrine of indefeasible personal responsibility brought to the front in Germany in the sixteenth century, and in England and Scotland in the seventeenth? It is not their fanaticism, still less is it their theology, which makes the great Puritan chiefs of England and the stern Covenanters of Scotland so heroic in our sight. It is the fact that they sought truth and ensued it, not thinking of the practicable nor cautiously counting majorities and minorities, but each man pondering and searching so 'as ever in the great Taskmaster's eye.'

It is no adequate answer to urge that this

awful consciousness of a divine presence and supervision has ceased to be the living fact it once was. That partly explains, but it certainly does not justify, our present lassitude. For the ever-wakeful eye of celestial power is not the only conceivable stimulus to responsibility. To pass from those grim heroes of protestantism to the French philosophers of the last century is a wide leap in a hundred respects, yet they too were pricked by the œstrus of intellectual responsibility. Their doctrine was dismally insufficient, and sometimes, as the present writer has often pointed out, it was directly vicious. Their daily lives were surrounded by much shabbiness and many meannesses. But, after all, no temptation and no menace, no pains or penalties for thinking about certain subjects, and no rewards for turning to think about something else, could divert such men as Voltaire and Diderot from their alert and strenuous search after such truth as could be vouchsafed to their imperfect lights. A catastrophe followed, it is true, but the misfortunes which attended it were due more to the champions of tradition and authority than to the soldiers of

emancipation. Even in the case of the latter, they were due to an inadequate doctrine, and not at all either to their sense of the necessity of free speculation and inquiry, or to the intrepidity with which they obeyed the promptings of that ennobling sense.

Perhaps the latest attempt of a considerable kind to suppress the political spirit in non-political concerns was the famous movement which had its birth a generation ago among the gray quadrangles and ancient gardens of Oxford, 'the sweet city with her dreaming spires,' where there has ever been so much detachment from the world, alongside of the coarsest and fiercest hunt after the grosser prizes of the world. No one has much less sympathy with the direction of the tractarian revival than the present writer, in whose Oxford days the star of Newman had set, and the sun of Mill had risen in its stead. And it is needful to distinguish the fervid and strong spirits with whom the revival began from the mimics of our later day. No doubt the mere occasion of tractarianism was political. Its leaders were alarmed at the designs imputed to the newly reformed parliament

of disestablishing the Anglican Church. They asked themselves the question, which I will put in their own words (*Tract* i.)—'Should the government of the country so far forget their God as to cut off the Church, to deprive it of its temporal honours and substance, on what will you rest the claims to respect and attention which you make upon your flock?' In answering this question they speedily found themselves, as might have been expected, at the opposite pole of thought from things political. The whole strength of their appeal to members of the Church lay in men's weariness of the high and dry optimism, which presents the existing order of things as the noblest possible, and the undisturbed way of the majority as the way of salvation. Apostolical succession and Sacramentalism may not have been in themselves progressive ideas. The spirit which welcomed them had at least the virtue of taking away from Cæsar the things that are not Cæsar's.

Glaring as were the intellectual faults of the Oxford movement, it was at any rate a recognition in a very forcible way of the doctrine that spiritual matters are not to be settled by the dicta of a

political council. It acknowledged that a man is answerable at his own peril for having found or lost the truth. It was a warning that he must reckon with a judge who will not account the *status quo*, nor the convenience of a cabinet, a good plea for indolent acquiescence in theological error. It ended, in the case of its most vigorous champions, in a final and deliberate putting out of the eyes of the understanding. The last act of assertion of personal responsibility was a headlong acceptance of the responsibility of tradition and the Church. This was deplorable enough. But apart from other advantages incidental to the tractarian movement, such as the attention which it was the means of drawing to history and the organic connection between present and past, it had, we repeat, the merit of being an effective protest against what may be called the House of Commons' view of human life—a view excellent in its place, but most blighting and dwarfing out of it. It was, what every sincere uprising of the better spirit in men and women must always be, an effective protest against the leaden tyranny of the man of the world and the so-called practical

person. The man of the world despises catholics for taking their religious opinions on trust and being the slaves of tradition. As if he had himself formed his own most important opinions either in religion or anything else. He laughs at them for their superstitious awe of the Church. As if his own inward awe of the Greater Number were one whit less of a superstition. He mocks their deference for the past. As if his own absorbing deference to the present were one tittle better bottomed or a jot more respectable. The modern emancipation will profit us very little if the *status quo* is to be fastened round our necks with the despotic authority of a heavenly dispensation, and if in the stead of ancient Scriptures we are to accept the plenary inspiration of Majorities.

It may be urged that if, as it is the object of the present chapter to state, there are opinions which a man should form for himself, and which it may yet be expedient that he should not only be slow to attempt to realise in practical life, but sometimes even slow to express,—then we are

demanding from him the performance of a troublesome duty, while we are taking from him the only motives which could really induce him to perform it. If, it may be asked, I am not to carry my notions into practice, nor try to induce others to accept them, nor even boldly publish them, why in the name of all economy of force should I take so much pains in forming opinions which are, after all, on these conditions so very likely to come to naught? The answer to this is that opinions do not come to naught, even if the man who holds them should never think fit to publish them. For one thing, as we shall see in our next division, the conditions which make against frank declaration of our convictions are of rare occurrence. And, apart from this, convictions may well exert a most decisive influence over our conduct, even if reasons exist, or seem to exist, for not pressing them on others. Though themselves invisible to the outer world, they may yet operate with magnetic force both upon other parts of our belief which the outer world does see, and upon the whole of our dealings with it. Whether we are good or bad, it is only a broken

and incoherent fragment of our whole personality that even those who are intimate with us, much less the common world, can ever come into contact with. The important thing is that the personality itself should be as little as possible broken, incoherent, and fragmentary; that reasoned and consistent opinions should back a firm will, and independent convictions inspire the intellectual self-respect and strenuous self-possession which the clamour of majorities and the silent yet ever-pressing force of the *status quo* are equally powerless to shake.

Character is doubtless of far more importance than mere intellectual opinion. We only too often see highly rationalised convictions in persons of weak purpose or low motives. But while fully recognising this, and the sort of possible reality which lies at the root of such a phrase as 'godless intellect' or 'intellectual devils'—though the phrase has no reality when it is used by self-seeking politicians or prelates—yet it is well to remember the very obvious truth that opinions are at least an extremely important part of character. As it is sometimes put, what we think has a prodigiously

close connection with what we are. The consciousness of having reflected seriously and conclusively on important questions, whether social or spiritual, augments dignity while it does not lessen humility. In this sense, taking thought can and does add a cubit to our stature. Opinions which we may not feel bound or even permitted to press on other people, are not the less forces for being latent. They shape ideals, and it is ideals that inspire conduct. They do this, though from afar, and though he who possesses them may not presume to take the world into his confidence. Finally, unless a man follows out ideas to their full conclusion without fear what the conclusion may be, whether he thinks it expedient to make his thought and its goal fully known or not, it is impossible that he should acquire a commanding grasp of principles. And a commanding grasp of principles, whether they are public or not, is at the very root of coherency of character. It raises mediocrity near to a level with the highest talents, if these talents are in company with a disposition that allows the little prudences of the hour incessantly to obscure the persistent laws of things.

These persistencies, if a man has once satisfied himself of their direction and mastered their bearings and application, are just as cogent and valuable a guide to conduct, whether he publishes them *ad urbem et orbem*, or esteems them too strong meat for people who have, through indurated use and wont, lost the courage of facing unexpected truths.

One conspicuous result of the failure to see that our opinions have roots to them, independently of the feelings which either majorities or other portions of the people around us may entertain about them, is that neither political matters nor any other serious branches of opinion, engage us in their loftiest or most deep-reaching forms. The advocate of a given theory of government or society is so misled by a wrong understanding of the practice of just and wise compromise in applying it, as to forget the noblest and most inspiring shape which his theory can be made to assume. It is the worst of political blunders to insist on carrying an ideal set of principles into execution, where others have rights of dissent, and those others persons whose assent is as indispensable to success, as it is impossible to attain. But to be

afraid or ashamed of holding such an ideal set of principles in one's mind in their highest and most abstract expression, does more than any one other cause to stunt or petrify those elements in character to which life should owe most of its savour.

If a man happens to be a Conservative, for instance, it is pitiful that he should think so much more of what other people on his side or the other think, than of the widest and highest of the ideas on which a conservative philosophy of life and human society reposes. Such ideas are these,—that the social union is the express creation and ordering of the Deity: that its movements follow his mysterious and fixed dispensation: that the church and the state are convertible terms, and each citizen of the latter is an incorporated member of the former: that conscience, if perversely and misguidedly self-asserting, has no rights against the decrees of the conscience of the nation: that it is the most detestable of crimes to perturb the pacific order of society either by active agitation or speculative restlessness: that descent from a long line of ancestors in great station adds an element of dignity to life, and imposes many high

obligations. We do not say that these and the rest of the propositions which make up the true theoretic basis of a conservative creed, are proper for the hustings, or expedient in an election address or a speech in parliament. We do say that if these high and not unintelligible principles, which alone can give to reactionary professions any worth or significance, were present in the minds of men who speak reactionary language, the country would be spared the ignominy of seeing certain real truths of society degraded at the hands of aristocratic adventurers and plutocratic parasites into some miserable process of 'dishing Whigs.'

This impoverishment of aims and depravation of principles by the triumph of the political spirit outside of its proper sphere, cannot unfortunately be restricted to any one set of people in the state. It is something in the very atmosphere, which no sanitary cordon can limit. Liberalism, too, would be something more generous, more attractive—yes, and more practically effective, if its professors and champions could allow their sense of what is feasible to be refreshed and widened by a more free recognition, however private and

undemonstrative, of the theoretic ideas which give their social creed whatever life and consistency it may have. Such ideas are these: That the conditions of the social union are not a mystery, only to be touched by miracle, but the results of explicable causes, and susceptible of constant modification: that the thoughts of wise and patriotic men should be perpetually turned towards the improvement of these conditions in every direction: that contented acquiescence in the ordering that has come down to us from the past is selfish and anti-social, because amid the ceaseless change that is inevitable in a growing organism, the institutions of the past demand progressive re-adaptations: that such improvements are most likely to be secured in the greatest abundance by limiting the sphere of authority, extending that of free individuality, and steadily striving after the bestowal, so far as the nature of things will ever permit it, of equality of opportunity: that while there is dignity in ancestry, a modern society is only safe in proportion as it summons capacity to its public counsels and enterprises: that such a society to endure must progress: that progress on

its political side means more than anything else the substitution of Justice as a governing idea, instead of Privilege, and that the best guarantee for justice in public dealings is the participation in their own government of the people most likely to suffer from injustice. This is not an exhaustive account of the progressive doctrine, and we have here nothing to say as to its soundness. We only submit that if those who use the watchwords of Liberalism were to return upon its principles, instead of dwelling exclusively on practical compromises, the tone of public life would be immeasurably raised. The cause of social improvement would be less systematically balked of the victories that are best worth gaining. Progress would mean something more than mere entrances and exits on the theatre of office. We should not see in the mass of parliamentary candidates—and they are important people, because nearly every Englishman with any ambition is a parliamentary candidate, actual or potential—that grave anxiety, that sober rigour, that immense caution, which are all so really laughable, because so many of these men are only anxious lest they should make

a mistake in finding out what the majority of their constituents would like them to think; only rigorous against those who are indiscreet enough to press a principle against the beck of a whip or a wire-puller; and only very cautious not so much lest their opinion should be wrong, as lest it should not pay.

Indolence and timidity have united to popularise among us a flaccid latitudinarianism, which thinks itself a benign tolerance for the opinions of others. It is in truth only a pretentious form of being without settled opinions of our own, and without any desire to settle them. No one can complain of the want of speculative activity at the present time in a certain way. The air, at a certain social elevation, is as full as it has ever been of ideas, theories, problems, possible solutions, suggested questions, and proffered answers. But then they are at large, without cohesion, and very apt to be the objects even in the more instructed minds of not much more than dilettante interest. We see in solution an immense number of notions, which people think it quite unnecessary to precipitate in the form of

convictions. We constantly hear the age lauded for its tolerance, for its candour, for its openness of mind, for the readiness with which a hearing is given to ideas that forty years ago, or even less than that, would have excluded persons suspected of holding them from decent society, and in fact did so exclude them. Before, however, we congratulate ourselves too warmly on this, let us be quite sure that we are not mistaking for tolerance what is really nothing more creditable than indifference. These two attitudes of mind, which are so vitally unlike in their real quality, are so hard to distinguish in their outer seeming.

One is led to suspect that carelessness is the right name for what looks like reasoned toleration, by such a line of consideration as the following. It is justly said that at the bottom of all the great discussions of modern society lie the two momentous questions, first whether there is a God, and second whether the soul is immortal. In other words, whether our fellow-creatures are the highest beings who take an interest in us, or in whom we need take an interest; and, then, whether life in this world is the only life of which we shall ever

be conscious. It is true of most people that when they are talking of evolution, and the origin of species, and the experiential or intuitional source of ideas, and the utilitarian or transcendental basis of moral obligation, these are the questions which they really have in their minds. Now, in spite of the scientific activity of the day, nobody is likely to contend that men are pressed keenly in their souls by any poignant stress of spiritual tribulation in the face of the two supreme enigmas. Nobody will say that there is much of that striving and wrestling and bitter agonising, which whole societies of men have felt before now on questions of far less tremendous import. Ours, as has been truly said, is 'a time of loud disputes and weak convictions.' In a generation deeply impressed by a sense of intellectual responsibility this could not be. As it is, even superior men are better pleased to play about the height of these great arguments, to fly in busy intellectual sport from side to side, from aspect to aspect, than they are intent on resolving what it is, after all, that the discussion comes to and to which solution, when everything has been said and heard, the balance of truth really seems

to incline. There are too many giggling epigrams, people are too willing to look on collections of mutually hostile opinions with the same kind of curiosity which they bestow on a collection of mutually hostile beasts in a menagerie. They have very faint predilections for one rather than another. If they were truly alive to the duty of conclusiveness, or to the inexpressible magnitude of the subjects which nominally occupy their minds, but really only exercise their tongues, this elegant Pyrrhonism would be impossible, and this light-hearted neutrality most unendurable.

Well has the illustrious Pascal said with reference to one of the two great issues of the modern controversy:—'The immortality of the soul is a thing that concerns us so closely and touches us so profoundly, that one must have lost all feeling to be indifferent as to knowing how the matter is. All our actions and all our thoughts must follow such different paths, according as there are eternal goods to hope for or are not, that it is impossible to take a step with sense and judgment, without regulating it in view of this point, which ought to be our first object. . . . I can have nothing but com-

passion for those who groan and travail in this doubt with all sincerity, who look on it as the worst of misfortunes, and who, sparing no pains to escape from it, make of this search their chief and most serious employment. . . But he who doubts and searches not is at the same time a grievous wrongdoer, and a grievously unfortunate man. If along with this he is tranquil and self-satisfied, if he publishes his contentment to the world and plumes himself upon it, and if it is this very state of doubt which he makes the subject of his joy and vanity—I have no terms in which to describe so extravagant a creature.'[1] Who, except a member of the school of extravagant creatures themselves, would deny that Pascal's irritation is most wholesome and righteous?

Perhaps in reply to this, we may be confronted by our own doctrine of intellectual responsibility interpreted in a directly opposite sense. We may be reminded of the long array of difficulties that interfere between us and knowledge in that tremendous matter, and of objections that rise in such perplexing force to an answer either one way or

[1] *Pensées*, II. Art. ii.

the other. And finally we may be despatched with a eulogy of caution and a censure of too great heat after certainty. The answer is that there is a kind of Doubt not without search, but after and at the end of search, which is not open to Pascal's just reproaches against the more ignoble and frivolous kind. And this too has been described for us by a subtle doctor of Pascal's communion. 'Are there pleasures of Doubt, as well as of Inference and Assent? In one sense there are. Not indeed if doubt means ignorance, uncertainty, or hopeless suspense; but there is a certain grave acquiescence in ignorance, a recognition of our impotence to solve momentous and urgent questions, which has a satisfaction of its own. After high aspirations, after renewed endeavours, after bootless toil, after long wanderings, after hope, effort, weariness, failure, painfully alternating and recurring, it is an immense relief to the exhausted mind to be able to say, "At length I know that I can know nothing about anything." . . . Ignorance remains the evil which it ever was, but something of the peace of certitude is gained in knowing the worst, and in having reconciled the mind to the endurance of

it.'[1] Precisely, and what one would say of our own age is that it will not deliberately face this knowledge of the worst. So it misses the peace of certitude, and not only its peace, but the strength and coherency that follow strict acceptance of the worst, when the worst is after all the best within reach.

Those who are in earnest when they blame too great haste after certainty, do in reality mean us to embrace certainty, but in favour of the vulgar opinions. They only see the prodigious difficulties of the controversy when you do not incline to their own side in it. They only panegyrise caution and the strictly provisional when they suspect that intrepidity and love of the conclusive would lead them to unwelcome shores. These persons, however, whether fortunately or unfortunately, have no longer much influence over the most active part of the national intelligence. Whether permanently or not, resolute orthodoxy, however prosperous it may seem among many of the uncultivated rich, has lost its hold upon thought. For thought has become dispersive, and the centrifugal forces of the human mind, among those who think seriously,

[1] Dr. Newman's *Grammar of Assent*, p. 201.

have for the time become dominant and supreme. No one, I suppose, imagines that the singular ecclesiastical revival which is now going on, is accompanied by any revival of real and reasoned belief; or that the opulent manufacturers who subscribe so generously for restored cathedral fabrics and the like, have been moved by the apologetics of *Aids to Faith* and the Christian Evidence Society.

Obviously only three ways of dealing with the great problems of which we have spoken are compatible with a strong and well-bottomed character. We may affirm that there is a deity with definable attributes; and that there is a conscious state and continued personality after the dissolution of the body. Or we may deny. Or we may assure ourselves that we have no faculties enabling us on good evidence either to deny or affirm. Intellectual self-respect and all the qualities that are derived from that, may well go with any one of these three courses, decisively followed and consistently applied in framing a rule of life and a settled scheme of its aims and motives. Why do we say that intellectual self-respect is not vigorous, nor the sense of intellectual responsibility and

truthfulness and coherency quick and wakeful among us? Because so many people, even among those who might be expected to know better, insist on the futile attempt to reconcile all those courses, instead of fixing on one and steadily abiding in it. They speak as if they affirmed, and they act as if they denied, and in their hearts they cherish a slovenly sort of suspicion that we can neither deny nor affirm. It may be said that this comes to much the same thing as if they had formally decided in the last or neutral sense. It is not so. This illegitimate union of three contradictories fritters character away, breaks it up into discordant parts, and dissolves into mercurial fluidity that leavening sincerity and free and cheerful boldness, which come of harmonious principles of faith and action, and without which men can never walk as confident lovers of justice and truth.

Ambrose's famous saying, that 'it hath not pleased the Lord to give his people salvation in dialectic,' has a profound meaning far beyond its application to theology. It is deeply true that

our ruling convictions are less the product of ratiocination than of sympathy, imagination, usage, tradition. But from this it does not follow that the reasoning faculties are to be further discouraged. On the contrary, just because the other elements are so strong that they can be trusted to take care of themselves, it is expedient to give special countenance to the intellectual habits, which alone can check and rectify the constantly aberrating tendencies of sentiment on the one side, and custom on the other. This remark brings us to another type, of whom it is not irrelevant to speak shortly in this place. The consequences of the strength of the political spirit are not all direct, nor does its strength by any means spring solely from its indulgence to the less respectable elements of character, such as languor, extreme pliableness, superficiality. On the contrary, it has an indirect influence in removing the only effective restraint on the excesses of some qualities which, when duly directed and limited, are among the most precious parts of our mental constitution. The political spirit is the great force in throwing love of truth and accurate

reasoning into a secondary place. The evil does not stop here. This achievement has indirectly countenanced the postponement of intellectual methods, and the diminution of the sense of intellectual responsibility, by a school that is anything rather than political.

Theology has borrowed, and coloured for her own use, the principles which were first brought into vogue in politics. If in the one field it is the fashion to consider convenience first and truth second, in the other there is a corresponding fashion of placing truth second and emotional comfort first. If there are some who compromise their real opinions, or the chance of reaching truth, for the sake of gain, there are far more who shrink from giving their intelligence free play, for the sake of keeping undisturbed certain luxurious spiritual sensibilities. This choice of emotional gratification before truth and upright dealing with one's own understanding, creates a character that is certainly far less unlovely than those who sacrifice their intellectual integrity to mere material convenience. The moral flaw is less palpable and less gross. Yet here too there is the stain of

intellectual improbity, and it is perhaps all the more mischievous for being partly hidden under the mien of spiritual exaltation.

There is in literature no more seductive illustration of this seductive type than Rousseau's renowned character of the Savoyard Vicar—penetrated with scepticism as to the attributes of the deity, the meaning of the holy rites, the authenticity of the sacred documents; yet full of reverence, and ever respecting in silence what he could neither reject nor understand. 'The essential worship,' he says, 'is the worship of the heart. God never rejects this homage, under whatever form it be offered to him. In old days I used to say mass with the levity which in time infects even the gravest things when we do them too often. Since acquiring my new principles [of reverential scepticism] I celebrate it with more veneration: I am overcome by the majesty of the Supreme Being, by his presence, by the insufficiency of the human mind, which conceives so ill what pertains to its author. When I approach the moment of consecration, I collect myself for performing the act with all the feelings required by

the church and the majesty of the sacrament. I strive to annihilate my reason before the Supreme Intelligence, saying, Who art thou that thou shouldst measure infinite power?'[1]

The Savoyard Vicar is not imaginary. The acquiescence in indefinite ideas for the sake of comforted emotions, and the abnegation of strong convictions in order to make room for free and plenteous effusion, have for us all the marks of a too familiar reality. Such a doctrine is an every-day plea for self-deception, and a current justification for illusion even among some of the finer spirits. They have persuaded themselves not only that the life of the religious emotions is the highest life, but that it is independent of the intellectual forms with which history happens to have associated it. And so they refine and sophisticate and make havoc with plain and honest interpretation, in order to preserve a soft serenity of soul unperturbed.

Now, we are not at all concerned to dispute such positions as that Feeling is the right starting-point of moral education; that in forming

[1] *Emile*, bk. iv.

character appeal should be to the heart rather than to the understanding; that the only basis on which our faculties can be harmoniously ordered is the preponderance of affection over reason. These propositions open much grave and complex discussion, and they are not to our present purpose. We only desire to state the evil of the notion that a man is warranted in comforting himself with dogmas and formularies, which he has first to empty of all definite, precise, and clearly determinable significance, before he can get them out of the way of his religious sensibilities. Whether Reason or Affection is to have the empire in the society of the future, when Reason may possibly have no more to discover for us in the region of morals and religion, and so will have become *emeritus* and taken a lower place, as of a tutor whose services the human family, being now grown up, no longer requires,—however this may be, it is at least certain that in the meantime the spiritual life of man needs direction quite as much as it needs impulse, and light quite as much as force. This direction and light can only be safely procured by the free and vigorous use of

the intelligence. But the intelligence is not free in the presence of a mortal fear lest its conclusions should trouble soft tranquillity of spirit. There is always hope of a man so long as he dwells in the region of the direct categorical proposition and the unambiguous term; so long as he does not deny the rightly drawn conclusion after accepting the major and minor premisses. This may seem a scanty virtue and very easy grace. Yet experience shows it to be too hard of attainment for those who tamper with disinterestedness of conviction, for the sake of luxuriating in the softness of spiritual transport without interruption from a syllogism. It is true that there are now and then in life as in history noble and fair natures, that by the silent teaching and unconscious example of their inborn purity, star-like constancy, and great devotion, do carry the world about them to further heights of living than can be attained by ratiocination. But these, the blameless and loved saints of the earth, rise too rarely on our dull horizons to make a rule for the world. The law of things is that they who tamper with veracity, from whatever motive, are

tampering with the vital force of human progress. Our comfort and the delight of the religious imagination are no better than forms of self-indulgence, when they are secured at the cost of that love of truth on which, more than on anything else, the increase of light and happiness among men must depend. We have to fight and do lifelong battle against the forces of darkness, and anything that turns the edge of reason blunts the surest and most potent of our weapons.

CHAPTER IV.

RELIGIOUS CONFORMITY.

THE main field of discussion touching Compromise in expression and avowal lies in the region of religious belief. In politics no one seriously contends that respect for the feelings and prejudices of other people requires us to be silent about our opinions. A republican, for instance, is at perfect liberty to declare himself so. Nobody will say that he is not within his rights if he should think it worth while to practise this liberty, though of course he will have to face the obloquy which attends all opinion that is not shared by the more demonstrative and vocal portions of the public. It is true that in every stable society a general conviction prevails of the extreme undesirableness of constantly laying bare the foundations of government. Incessant discussion of the theoretical bases of the social union is naturally considered

worse than idle. It is felt by many wise men that the chief business of the political thinker is to interest himself in generalisations of such a sort as leads with tolerable straightness to practical improvements of a far-reaching and durable kind. Even among those, however, who thus feel it not to be worth while to be for ever handling the abstract principles which are, after all, only clumsy expressions of the real conditions that bring and keep men together in society, yet nobody of any consideration pretends to silence or limit the free discussion of these principles. Although a man is not likely to be thanked who calls attention to the vast discrepancies between the theory and practice of the constitution, yet nobody now would countenance the notion of an inner doctrine in politics. We smile at the line that Hume took in speaking of the doctrine of non-resistance. He did not deny that the right of resistance to a tyrannical sovereign does actually belong to a nation. But, he said, 'if ever on any occasion it were laudable to conceal truth from the populace, it must be confessed that the doctrine of resistance affords such an example; and that all speculative reasoners

ought to observe with regard to this principle the same cautious silence which the laws, in every species of government, have ever prescribed to themselves.' As if the cautious silence of the political writer could prevent a populace from feeling the heaviness of an oppressor's hand, and striving to find relief from unjust burdens. As if any nation endowed with enough of the spirit of independence to assent to the right of resistance when offered to them as a speculative theorem, would not infallibly be led by the same spirit to assert the right without the speculative theorem. That so acute a head as Hume's should have failed to perceive these very plain considerations, and that he should moreover have perpetrated the absurdity of declaring the right of resistance, in the same breath in which he declares the laudableness of keeping it a secret, only shows how carefully a man need steer after he has once involved himself in the labyrinths of Economy.[1]

[1] It may be said that Hume meant no more than this: that of two equally oppressed nations, the one which had been taught to assent to the doctrine of resistance would be more likely to practise 'the sacred duty of insurrection' than the other, from whom the doctrine had been concealed.

In religion the unreasonableness of imposing a similar cautious silence is not yet fully established, nor the vicious effects of practising it clearly recognised. In these high matters an amount of economy and management is held praiseworthy, which in any other subject would be universally condemned as cowardly and ignoble. Indeed the preliminary stage has scarcely been reached—the stage in which public opinion grants to every one the unrestricted right of shaping his own beliefs, independently of those of the people who surround him. Any woman, for instance, suspected of having cast behind her the Bible and all practices of devotion and the elementary articles of the

Or, in other words, that the first would rise against oppression, when the oppression had reached a pitch which to the second would still seem bearable. The answer to Hume's proposition, interpreted in this way, would be that if the doctrine of resistance be presented to the populace in its true shape,—if it be 'truth,' as he admits,—then the application of it in practice should be as little likely to prove mischievous as that of any other truth. If the gist of the remark be that this is a truth which the populace is especially likely to apply wrongly, in consequence of its ignorance, passion, and heedlessness, we may answer by appealing to history, which is rather a record of excessive patience in the various nations of the earth than of excessive petulance.

common creed, would be distrustfully regarded even by those who wink at the same kind of mental boldness in men. Nay, she would be so regarded even by some of the very men who have themselves discarded as superstition what they still wish women to retain for law and gospel. So long as any class of adults are effectually discouraged in the free use of their minds upon the most important subjects, we are warranted in saying that the era of free thought, which naturally precedes the era of free speech, is still imperfectly developed.

The duties and rights of free speech are by no means identical with those of independent thought. One general reason for this is tolerably plain. The expression of opinion directly affects other people, while its mere formation directly affects no one but ourselves. Therefore the limits of compromise in expression are less widely and freely placed, because the rights and interests of all who may be made listeners to our spoken or written words are immediately concerned. In forming opinions, a man or woman owes no consideration to any person or persons whatever. Truth is the single object. It is truth that in the forum of

conscience claims an undivided allegiance. The publication of opinion stands on another footing. That is an external act, with possible consequences, like all other external acts, both to the doer and to every one within the sphere of his influence. And, besides these, it has possible consequences to the prosperity of the opinion itself.[1]

A hundred questions of fitness, of seasonableness, of conflicting expediencies, present themselves in this connection, and nothing gives more anxiety to a sensible man who holds notions opposed to the current prejudices, than to hit the right mark where intellectual integrity and prudence, firmness and wise reserve, are in exact accord. When we come to declaring opinions that are, however foolishly and unreasonably, associated with pain and even a kind of turpitude in the minds of those

[1] There is another ground for the distinction between the conditions of holding and those of expressing opinion. This depends upon the psychological proposition that belief is independent of the will. Though this or any other state of the understanding may be involuntary, the manifestation of such a state is not so, but is a voluntary act, and, 'being neutral in itself, may be commendable or reprehensible according to the circumstances in which it takes place' (Bailey's *Essay on Formation of Opinion*, § 7).

who strongly object to them, then some of our most powerful sympathies are naturally engaged. We wonder whether duty to truth can possibly require us to inflict keen distress on those to whom we are bound by the tenderest and most consecrated ties. This is so wholly honourable a sentiment, that no one who has not made himself drunk with the thin sour wine of a crude and absolute logic will refuse to consider it. Before, however, attempting to illustrate cases of conscience in this order, we venture to make a short digression into the region of the matter, as distinct from the manner of free speech. One or two changes of great importance in the way in which men think about religion, bear directly upon the conditions on which they may permit themselves and others to speak about it.

The peculiar character of all the best kinds of dissent from the nominal creed of the time, makes it rather less difficult for us to try to reconcile unflinching honesty with a just and becoming regard for the feelings of those who have claims upon our forbearance, than would have been the

case a hundred years ago. 'It is not now with a polite sneer,' as a high ecclesiastical authority lately admitted, 'still less with a rude buffet or coarse words, that Christianity is assailed.' Before churchmen congratulate themselves too warmly on this improvement in the nature of the attack, perhaps they ought to ask themselves how far it is due to the change in the position of the defending party. The truth is that the coarse and realistic criticism of which Voltaire was the consummate master, has done its work. It has driven the defenders of the old faith into the milder and more genial climate of non-natural interpretations, and the historic sense, and a certain elastic relativity of dogma. The old criticism was victorious, but after victory it vanished. One reason of this was that the coarse and realistic forms of belief had either vanished before it, or else they forsook their ancient pretensions and clothed themselves in more modest robes. The consequence of this, and of other causes which might be named, is that the modern attack, while fully as serious and much more radical, has a certain gravity, decorum, and worthiness of form. No one of any sense or

knowledge now thinks the Christian religion had its origin in deliberate imposture. The modern freethinker does not attack it; he explains it. And what is more, he explains it by referring its growth to the better, and not to the worse part of human nature. He traces it to men's cravings for a higher morality. He finds its source in their aspirations after nobler expression of that feeling for the incommensurable things, which is in truth under so many varieties of inwoven pattern the common universal web of religious faith.

The result of this way of looking at a creed which a man no longer accepts, is that he is able to speak of it with patience and historic respect. He can openly mark his dissent from it, without exacerbating the orthodox sentiment by galling pleasantries or bitter animadversion upon details. We are now awake to the all-important truth that belief in this or that detail of superstition is the result of an irrational state of mind, and flows logically from superstitious premisses. We see that it is to begin at the wrong end, to assail the deductions as impossible, instead of sedulously

building up a state of mind in which their impossibility would become spontaneously visible.

Besides the great change which such a point of view makes in men's way of speaking of a religion, whose dogmas and documents they reject, there is this further consideration leaning in the same direction. The tendency of modern free thought is more and more visibly towards the extraction of the first and more permanent elements of the old faith, to make the purified material of the new. When Dr. Congreve met the famous epigram about Comte's system being Catholicism minus Christianity, by the reply that it is Catholicism plus Science, he gave an ingenious expression to the direction which is almost necessarily taken by all who attempt, in however informal a manner, to construct for themselves some working system of faith, in place of the faith which science and criticism have sapped. In what ultimate form, acceptable to great multitudes of men, these attempts will at last issue, no one can now tell. For we, like the Hebrews of old, shall all have to live and die in faith, 'not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and being

persuaded of them, and embracing them, and confessing that we are strangers and pilgrims on the earth.' Meanwhile, after the first great glow and passion of the just and necessary revolt of reason against superstition have slowly lost the exciting splendour of the dawn, and become diffused in the colourless space of a rather bleak noonday, the mind gradually collects again some of the ideas of the old religion of the West, and willingly, or even joyfully, suffers itself to be once more breathed upon by something of its spirit. Christianity was the last great religious synthesis. It is the one nearest to us. Nothing is more natural than that those who cannot rest content with intellectual analysis, while awaiting the advent of the Saint Paul of the humanitarian faith of the future, should gather up provisionally such fragmentary illustrations of this new faith as are to be found in the records of the old. Whatever form may be ultimately imposed on our vague religious aspirations by some prophet to come, who shall unite sublime depth of feeling and lofty purity of life with strong intellectual grasp and the gift of a noble eloquence, we may at least be

sure of this, that it will stand as closely related to Christianity as Christianity stood closely related to the old Judaic dispensation. It is commonly assumed that the rejecters of the popular religion stand in face of it, as the Christians stood in face of the pagan belief and pagan rites in the Empire. The analogy is inexact. The modern denier, if he is anything better than that, or entertains hopes of a creed to come, is nearer to the position of the Christianising Jew.[1] Science, when she

[1] The following words, illustrating the continuity between the Christian and Jewish churches, are not without instruction to those who meditate on the possible continuity between the Christian church and that which is one day to grow into the place of it:—'Not only do forms and ordinances remain under the Gospel equally as before; but, what was in use before is not so much superseded by the Gospel ordinances as changed into them. What took place under the Law is a pattern, what was commanded is a rule, under the Gospel. The substance remains, the use, the meaning, the circumstances, the benefit is changed; grace is added, life is infused: "the body is of Christ;" but it is in great measure that same body which was in being before He came. The Gospel has not put aside, it has incorporated into itself the revelation which went before it. It avails itself of the Old Testament, as a great gift to Christian as well as to Jew. It does not dispense with it, but it dispenses it. Persons sometimes urge that there is no code of duty in the New Testament, no ceremonial, no rules for Church polity.

has accomplished all her triumphs in her own order, will still have to go back, when the time comes, to assist in the building up of a new creed by which men can live. The builders will have to seek material in the purified and sublimated ideas, of which the confessions and rites of the Christian churches have been the grosser expression. Just as what was once the new dispensation was preached *a Judæis ad Judæos apud Judæos*, so must the new, that is to be, find a Christian teacher and Christian hearers. It can hardly be other than an expansion, a development, a re-adaptation, of all the moral and spiritual truth that lay hidden under the worn-out forms. It must be such a harmonising of the truth with our intellectual conceptions as shall fit it to be an active guide to conduct. In a world '*where men sit and hear each other groan, where but to*

Certainly not; they are unnecessary; they are already given in the Old. Why should the Old Testament remain in the Christian church but to be used? *There* we are to look for our forms, our rites, our polity; only illustrated, tempered, spiritualised by the Gospel. The precepts remain, the observance of them is changed.'—Dr. J. H. Newman: *Sermon on Subjects of the Day*, p. 205.

think is to be full of sorrow,' it is hard to imagine a time when we shall be indifferent to that sovereign legend of Pity. We have to incorporate it in some wider gospel of Justice and Progress.

I shall not, I hope, be suspected of any desire to prophesy too smooth things. It is no object of ours to bridge over the gulf between belief in the vulgar theology and disbelief. Nor for a single moment do we pretend that, when all the points of contact between virtuous belief and virtuous disbelief are made the most of that good faith will allow, there will not still and after all remain a terrible controversy between those who cling passionately to all the consolations, mysteries, personalities, of the orthodox faith, and us who have made up our minds to face the worst, and to shape, as best we can, a life in which the cardinal verities of the common creed shall have no place. The future faith, like the faith of the past, brings not peace but a sword. It is a tale not of concord, but of households divided against themselves. Those who are incessantly striving to make the old bottles

hold the new wine, to reconcile the irreconcilable, to bring the Bible and the dogmas of the churches to be good friends with history and criticism, are prompted by the humanest intention.[1] One sympathises with this amiable anxiety to soften shocks, and break the rudeness of a vital transition. In this essay, at any rate, there is no such attempt. We know that it is the son against the father, and the mother-in-law against the daughter-in-law. No softness of speech will disguise the portentous differences between those who admit a supernatural revelation and those who deny it. No charity nor goodwill can narrow the intellectual breach between those who declare that a world without an ever-present Creator with intelligible attributes would be to them empty and void, and those who insist that none of the attributes of a Creator can ever be grasped by the finite intelli-

[1] There is a set of most acute and searching criticisms on this matter in Mr. Leslie Stephen's *Essays on Free-Thinking and Plain-Speaking* (Longmans, 1873). The last essay in the volume, *An Apology for Plain-Speaking*, is a decisive and remarkable exposition of the treacherous playing with words, which underlies even the most vigorous efforts to make the phrases and formulæ of the old creed hold the reality of new faith.

gence of men.[1] Our object in urging the purpose, semi-conservative, and almost sympathetic quality, which distinguishes the unbelief of to-day from the unbelief of a hundred years ago, is only to show that the most strenuous and upright of plain-speakers is less likely to shock and wound the lawful sensibilities of devout persons than he would have been so long as unbelief went no further than bitter attack on small details. In short, all save the purely negative and purely

[1] Upon this sentence the following criticism has been made:—'Surely both of these so-called contradictions are deliberately affirmed by the vast majority of all thinkers upon the subject. What orthodox asserter of the omnipresence of a "Creator with intelligible attributes" ever maintained that these attributes could be "grasped by men"?'—The orthodox asserter, no doubt, *says* that he does not maintain that the divine attributes can be grasped by men; but his habitual treatment of them as intelligible, and as the subjects of propositions made in language that is designed to be intelligible, shows that his first reservation is merely nominal, as it is certainly inconsistent with his general position. Religious people who warn you most solemnly that man who is a worm and the son of a worm cannot possibly compass in his puny understanding the attributes of the Divine Being, will yet—as an eminent divine not in holy orders has truly said—tell you all about him, as if he were the man who lives in the next street.

destructive school of freethinkers, are now able to deal with the beliefs from which they dissent, in a way which makes patient and disinterested controversy not wholly impossible.

One more point of much importance ought to be mentioned. The belief that heresy is the result of wilful depravity is fast dying out. People no longer seriously think that speculative error is bound up with moral iniquity, or that mistaken thinking is either the result or the cause of wicked living. Even the official mouthpieces of established beliefs now usually represent a bad heart as only one among other possible causes of unbelief. It divides the curse with ignorance, intellectual shallowness, the unfortunate influence of plausible heresiarchs, and other alternative roots of evil. They thus leave a way of escape, by which the person who does not share their own convictions may still be credited with a good moral character. Some persons, it is true, 'cannot see how a man who deliberately rejects the Roman Catholic religion can, in the eyes of those who earnestly believe it, be other than a rebel against God.' They assure us that, 'as opinions

become better marked and more distinctly connected with action, the truth that decided dissent from them implies more or less of a reproach upon those who hold them decidedly, becomes so obvious that every one perceives it.' No doubt a protestant or a sceptic regards the beliefs of a catholic as a reproach upon the believer's understanding. So the man whose whole faith rests on the miraculous and on acts of special intervention, regards the strictly positive and scientific thinker as the dupe of a crude and narrow logic. But this now carries with it no implication of moral obliquity. De Maistre's rather grotesque conviction that infidels always die of horrible diseases with special names, could now only be held among the very dregs of the ecclesiastical world.

Nor is it correct to say that 'when religious differences come to be, and are regarded as, mere differences of opinion, it is because the controversy is really decided in the sceptical sense.' Those who agree with the present writer, for example, are not sceptics. They positively, absolutely, and without reserve, reject as false the whole system of objective propositions which make up the

popular belief of the day, in one and all of its theological expressions. They look upon that system as mischievous in its consequences to society, for many reasons,—among others because it tends to divert and misdirect the most energetic faculties of human nature. This, however, does not make them suspect the motives or the habitual morality of those who remain in the creed in which they were nurtured. The difference is a difference of opinion, as purely as if we refused to accept the undulatory theory of light; and we treat it as such. Then reverse this. Why is it any more impossible for those who remain in the theological stage, who are not in the smallest degree sceptical, who in their heart of hearts embrace without a shadow of misgiving all the mysteries of the faith, why is it any more impossible for them than for us, whose convictions are as strong as theirs, to treat the most radical dissidence as that and nothing other or worse? Logically, it perhaps might not be hard to convict them of inconsistency, but then, as has been so often said, inconsistency is a totally different thing from insincerity, or doubting adherence, or silent scepticism. The beliefs of an

ordinary man are a complex structure of very subtle materials, all compacted into a whole, not by logic, but by lack of logic; not by syllogism or sorites, but by the vague.

As a plain matter of fact and observation, we may all perceive that dissent from religious opinion less and less implies reproach in any serious sense. We all of us know in the flesh liberal catholics and latitudinarian protestants, who hold the very considerable number of beliefs that remain to them, quite as firmly and undoubtingly as believers who are neither liberal nor latitudinarian. The compatibility of error in faith with virtue in conduct is to them only a mystery the more, a branch of the insoluble problem of Evil, permitted by a Being at once all-powerful and all-benevolent. Stringent logic may make short work of either fact,—a benevolent author of evil, or a virtuous despiser of divine truth. But in an atmosphere of mystery, logical contradictions melt away. Faith gives a sanction to that tolerant and charitable judgment of the character of heretics, which has its real springs partly in common human sympathy whereby we are all bound to one another,

and partly in experience, which teaches us that practical righteousness and speculative orthodoxy do not always have their roots in the same soil. The world is every day growing larger. The range of the facts of the human race is being enormously extended by naturalists, by historians, by philologists, by travellers, by critics. The manifold past experiences of humanity are daily opening out to us in vaster and at the same time more ordered proportions. And so even those who hold fast to Christianity as the noblest, strongest, and only final conclusion of these experiences, are yet constrained to admit that it is no more than a single term in a very long and intricate series.

The object of the foregoing digression is to show some cause for thinking that dissent from the current beliefs is less and less likely to inflict upon those who retain them any very intolerable kind or degree of mental pain. Therefore it is in so far all the plainer, as well as easier, a duty not to conceal such dissent. What we have been saying comes to this. If a believer finds that his son, for instance, has ceased to believe, he no

longer has this disbelief thrust upon him in gross and irreverent forms. Nor does he any longer suppose that the unbelieving son must necessarily be a profligate. And moreover, in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred, he no longer supposes that infidels, of his own family or acquaintance at any rate, will consume for eternal ages in lakes of burning marl.

Let us add another consideration. One reason why so many persons are really shocked and pained by the avowal of heretical opinions is the very fact that such avowal is uncommon. If unbelievers and doubters were more courageous, believers would be less timorous. It is because they live in an enervating fool's paradise of seeming assent and conformity, that the breath of an honest and outspoken word strikes so eager and nipping on their sensibilities. If they were not encouraged to suppose that all the world is of their own mind, if they were forced out of that atmosphere of self-indulgent silences and hypocritical reserves, which is systematically poured round them, they would acquire a robuster mental habit. They would learn to take dissents for what they are worth. They would be led either to strengthen or to

discard their own opinions, if the dissents happened to be weighty or instructive; either to refute or neglect such dissents as should be ill-founded or insignificant. They will remain valetudinarians, so long as a curtain of compromise shelters them from the real belief of those of their neighbours who have ventured to use their minds with some measure of independence. A very brief contact with people who, when the occasion comes, do not shrink from saying what they think, is enough to modify that excessive liability to be shocked at truth-speaking, which is only so common because truth-speaking itself is so unfamiliar.

Now, however great the pain inflicted by the avowal of unbelief, it seems to the present writer that one relationship in life, and one only, justifies us in being silent where otherwise it would be right to speak. This relationship is that between child and parents. Those parents are wisest who train their sons and daughters in the utmost liberty both of thought and speech; who do not instil dogmas into them, but inculcate upon them the sovereign importance of correct ways of forming opinions; who, while never dissembling the great

fact that if one opinion is true, its contradictory cannot be true also, but must be a lie and must partake of all the evil qualities of a lie, yet always set them the example of listening to unwelcome opinions with patience and candour. Still all parents are not wise. They cannot all endure to hear of any religious opinions except their own. Where it would give them sincere and deep pain to hear a son or daughter avow disbelief in the inspiration of the Bible and so forth, then it seems that the younger person is warranted in refraining from saying that he or she does not accept such and such doctrines. This, of course, only where the son or daughter feels a tender and genuine attachment to the parent. Where the parent has not earned this attachment, has been selfish, indifferent, or cruel, the title to the special kind of forbearance of which we are speaking can hardly exist. In an ordinary way, however, a parent has a claim on us which no other person in the world can have, and a man's self-respect ought scarcely to be injured if he finds himself shrinking from playing the apostle to his own father and mother.

One can indeed imagine circumstances where

this would not be true. If you are persuaded that you have had revealed to you a glorious gospel of light and blessedness, it is impossible not to thirst to impart such tidings most eagerly to those who are closest about your heart. We are not in that position. We have as yet no magnificent vision, so definite, so touching, so 'clothed with the beauty of a thousand stars,' as to make us eager, for the sake of it, to murder all the sweetnesses of filial piety in an aggressive eristic. This much one concedes. Yet let us ever remember that those elders are of nobler type who have kept their minds in a generous freedom, and have made themselves strong with that magnanimous confidence in truth, which the Hebrew expressed in old phrase, that if counsel or work be of men it will come to nought, but if it be of God ye cannot overthrow it.

Even in the case of parents, and even though our new creed is but rudimentary, there can be no good reason why we should go further in the way of economy than mere silence. Neither they nor any other human being can possibly have a right to expect us, not merely to abstain from the open expression of dissents, but positively to profess

unreal and feigned assents. No fear of giving pain, no wish to soothe the alarms of those to whom we owe much, no respect for the natural clinging of the old to the faith which has accompanied them through honourable lives, can warrant us in saying that we believe to be true what we are convinced is false. The most lax moralist counts a lie wrong, even when the motive is unselfish and springs from the desire to give pleasure to those whom it is our duty to please. A deliberate lie avowedly does not cease to be one because it concerns spiritual things. Nor is it the less wrong because it is uttered by one to whom all spiritual things have become indifferent. Filial affection is a motive which would, if any motive could, remove some of the taint of meanness with which pious lying, like every other kind of lying, tends to infect character. The motive may no doubt ennoble the act, though the act remains in the category of forbidden things. But the motive of these complaisant assents and false affirmations, taken at their very best, is still comparatively a poor motive. No real elevation of spirit is possible for a man who is willing to subordinate his con-

victions to his domestic affections, and to bring himself to a habit of viewing falsehood lightly, lest the truth should shock the illegitimate and over-exacting sensibilities either of his parents or any one else. We may understand what is meant by the logic of the feelings, and accept it as the proper corrective for a too intense egoism. But when the logic of the feelings is invoked to substitute the egoism of the family for the slightly narrower egoism of the individual, it can hardly be more than a fine name for self-indulgence and a callous indifference to all the largest human interests.

This brings us to consider the case of another no less momentous relationship, and the kind of compromise in the matter of religious conformity which it justifies or imposes. It constantly happens that the husband has wholly ceased to believe the religion to which his wife clings with unshaken faith. We need not enter into the causes why women remain in bondage to opinions which so many cultivated men either reject or else hold in a transcendental and non-natural sense. The only question with which we are concerned is the

amount of free assertion of his own convictions which a man should claim and practise, when he knows that such convictions are distasteful to his wife. Is it lawful, as it seems to be in dealing with parents, to hold his conviction silently? Is it lawful either positively or by implication to lead his wife to suppose that he shares her opinions, when in truth he rejects them?

If it were not for the maxims and practice in daily use among men otherwise honourable, one would not suppose it possible that two answers could be given to these questions by any one with the smallest pretence of principle or self-respect. As it is, we all of us know men who deliberately reject the entire Christian system, and still think it compatible with uprightness to summon their whole establishments round them at morning and evening, and on their knees to offer up elaborately formulated prayers, which have just as much meaning to them as the entrails of the sacrificial victim had to an infidel haruspex. We see the same men diligently attending religious services; uttering assents to confessions of which they really reject every syllable; kneeling, rising, bowing,

with deceptive solemnity; even partaking of the sacrament with a consummate devoutness that is very edifying to all who are not in the secret, and who do not know that they are acting a part, and making a mock both of their own reason and their own probity, merely to please persons whose delusions they pity and despise from the bottom of their hearts.

On the surface there is certainly nothing to distinguish this kind of conduct from the grossest hypocrisy. Is there anything under the surface to relieve it from this complexion? Is there any weight in the sort of answer which such men make to the accusation that their conformity is a very degrading form of deceit, and a singularly mischievous kind of treachery? Is the plea of a wish to spare mental discomfort to others an admissible and valid plea? It seems to us to be none of these things, and for the following among other reasons.

If a man drew his wife by lot, or by any other method over which neither he nor she has any control, as in the case of parents, perhaps he might with some plausibleness contend that he owed her certain limited deferences and reserves,

just as we admit that he may owe them to his parents. But this is not the case. Marriage, in this country at least, is the result of mutual choice. If men and women do as a matter of fact usually make this choice hastily and on wofully imperfect information of one another's characters, that is no warrant for a resort to unlawful expedients to remedy the blunder. If a woman cares ardently enough about religion to feel keen distress at the idea of dissent from it on the part of those closely connected with her, she surely may be expected to take reasonable pains to ascertain beforehand the religious attitude of one with whom she is about to unite herself for life. On the other hand, if a man sets any value on his own opinions, if they are in any real sense a part of himself, he must be guilty of something like deliberate and systematic duplicity during the acquaintance preceding marriage, if his dissent has remained unsuspected. Certainly if men go through society before marriage under false colours, and feign beliefs which they do not hold, they have only themselves to thank for the degradation of having to keep up the imposture afterwards. Suppose a

protestant were to pass himself off for a catholic because he happened to meet a catholic lady whom he desired to marry. Everybody would agree in calling such a man by a very harsh name. It is hard to see why a freethinker, who by reticence and conformity passes himself off for a believer, should be more leniently judged. The differences between a catholic and a protestant are assuredly not any greater than those between a believer and an unbeliever. We all admit the baseness of dissimulation in the former case. Why is it any less base in the latter?

Marriages, however, are often made in haste, or heedlessly, or early in life, before either man or woman has come to feel very deeply about religion either one way or another. The woman does not know how much she will need religion, nor what comfort it may bring to her. The man does not know all the objections to it which may disclose themselves to his understanding as the years ripen. There is always at work that most unfortunate maxim, tacitly held and acted upon in ninety-nine marriages out of a hundred, that money is of importance, and social position is of importance, and

good connections are of importance, and health and manners and comely looks, and that the only thing which is of no importance whatever is opinion and intellectual quality and temper. Now granting that both man and woman are indifferent at the time of their union, is that any reason why upon either of them acquiring serious convictions, the other should be expected, out of mere complaisance, to make a false and hypocritical pretence of sharing them? To see how flimsy is this plea of fearing to give pain to the religious sensitiveness of women, we have only to imagine one or two cases which go beyond the common experience, yet which ought not to strain the plea, if it be valid.

Thus, if my wife turns catholic, am I to pretend to turn catholic too, to save her the horrible distress of thinking that I am doomed to eternal perdition? Or if she chooses to embrace the doctrine of direct illumination from heaven, and to hear voices bidding her to go or come, to do or abstain from doing, am I too to shape my conduct after these fancied monitions? Or if it comes into her mind to serve tables, and to listen

in all faith to the miracles of spiritualism, am I, lest I should pain her, to feign a surrender of all my notions of evidence, to pretend a transformation of all my ideas of worthiness in life and beyond life, and to go to séances with the same regularity and seriousness with which you go to church? Of course in each of these cases everybody who does not happen to share the given peculiarity of belief, will agree that however severely a husband's dissent might pain the wife, whatever distress and discomfort it might inflict upon her, yet he would be bound to let her suffer, rather than sacrifice his veracity and self-respect. Why then is it any less discreditable to practise an insincere conformity in more ordinary circumstances? If the principle of such conformity is good for anything at all, it ought to cover these less usual cases as completely as the others which are more usual. Indeed there would be more to be said on behalf of conformity for politeness' sake, where the woman had gone through some great process of change, for then one might suppose that her heart was deeply set on the matter. Even then the plea would be worthless, but it is more indisputably worthless

still where the sentiment which we are bidden to respect at the cost of our own freedom of speech is nothing more laudable than a fear of moving out of the common groove of religious opinion, or an intolerant and unreasoned bigotry, or mere stupidity and silliness of the vulgarest type.[1]

Ah, it is said, you forget that women cannot live without religion. The present writer is equally of this opinion that women cannot be happy with-

[1] That able man, the late J. E. Cairnes, suggested the following objection to this paragraph. When two persons marry, there is a reasonable expectation, almost amounting to an understanding, that they will both of them adhere to their religion, just as both of them tacitly agree to follow the ways of the world in the host of minor social matters. If, therefore, either of them turns to some other creed, the person so turning has, so to speak, broken the contract. The utmost he or she can contend for is forbearance. If a woman embraces catholicism, she may seek tolerance, but she has no right to exact conformity. If the man becomes an unbeliever, he in like manner breaks the bargain, and may be justly asked not to flaunt his misdemeanour.

My answer to this would turn upon the absolute inexpediency of such silent bargains being assumed by public opinion. In the present state of opinion, where the whole air is alive with the spirit of change, nobody who takes his life or her life seriously, could allow an assumption which means reduction of one of the most important parts of character, the love of truth, to a nullity.

out a religion, nor men either. That is not the question. It does not follow because a woman cannot be happy without a religion, that therefore she cannot be happy unless her husband is of the same religion. Still less, that she would be made happy by his insincerely pretending to be of the same religion. And least of all is it true, if both these propositions were credible, that even then for the sake of her happiness he is bound not merely to live a life of imposture, but in so doing to augment the general forces of imposture in the world, and to make the chances of truth, light, and human improvement more and more unfavourable. Women are at present far less likely than men to possess a sound intelligence and a habit of correct judgment. They will remain so, while they have less ready access than men to the best kinds of literary and scientific training, and—what is far more important—while social arrangements exclude them from all those kinds of public activity, which are such powerful agents both in fitting men to judge soundly, and in forming in them the sense of responsibility for their judgments being sound.

It may be contended that this alleged stronger religiosity of women, however coarse and poor in its formulæ, is yet of constant value as a protest in favour of the maintenance of the religious element in human character and life, and that this is a far more important thing for us all than the greater or less truth of the dogmas with which such religiosity happens to be associated. In reply to this, without tediously labouring the argument, I venture to make the following observations. In the first place, it is an untenable idea that religiosity or devoutness of spirit is valuable in itself, without reference to the goodness or badness of the dogmatic forms and the practices in which it clothes itself. A fakir would hardly be an estimable figure in our society, merely because his way of living happens to be a manifestation of the religious spirit. If the religious spirit leads to a worthy and beautiful life, if it shows itself in cheerfulness, in pity, in charity and tolerance, in forgiveness, in a sense of the largeness and the mystery of things, in a lifting up of the soul in gratitude and awe to some supreme power and sovereign force, then whatever drawback there

may be in the way of superstitious dogma, still such a spirit is on the whole a good thing. If not, not. It would be better without the superstition: even with the superstition it is good. But if the religious spirit is only a fine name for narrowness of understanding, for stubborn intolerance, for mere social formality, for a dread of losing that poor respectability which means thinking and doing exactly as the people around us think and do, then the religious spirit is not a good thing, but a thoroughly bad and hateful thing. To that we owe no management of any kind. Any one who suppresses his real opinions, and feigns others, out of deference to such a spirit as this in his household, ought to say plainly both to himself and to us that he cares more for his own ease and undisturbed comfort than he cares for truth and uprightness. For it is that, and not any tenderness for holy things, which is the real ground of his hypocrisy.

Now with reference to the religious spirit in its nobler form, it is difficult to believe that any one genuinely animated by it would be soothed by

the knowledge that her dearest companion is going through life with a mask on, quietly playing a part, uttering untrue professions, doing his best to cheat her and the rest of the world by a monstrous spiritual make-believe. One would suppose that instead of having her religious feeling gratified by conformity on these terms, nothing could wound it so bitterly nor outrage it so unpardonably. To know that her sensibility is destroying the entireness of the man's nature, its loyalty alike to herself and to truth, its freedom and singleness and courage—surely this can hardly be less distressing to a fine spirit than the suspicion that his heresies may bring him to the pit, or than the void of going through life without even the semblance of religious sympathy between them. If it be urged that the woman would never discover the piety of the man to be a counterfeit, we reply that unless her own piety were of the merely formal kind, she would be sure to make the discovery. The congregation in the old story were untouched by the disguised devil's eloquence on behalf of religion: it lacked unction. The verbal conformity of the unbeliever lacks unction,

and its hollowness is speedily revealed to the quick apprehension of true faith.[1]

Let us not be supposed to be arguing in favour of incessant battle of high dialectic in the household. Nothing could be more destructive of the gracious composure and mental harmony, of which household life ought to be, but perhaps seldom is, the great organ and instrument. Still less are we pleading for the freethinker's right at every hour of day or night to mock, sneer, and gibe at the sincere beliefs and conscientiously performed rites of those, whether men or women, whether strangers or kinsfolk, from whose religion he disagrees. 'It

[1] The reader remembers how Wolmar, the atheistic husband of Julie in Rousseau's *New Heloïsa*, is distressed by the chagrin which his unbelief inflicts on the piety of his wife. 'He told me that he had been frequently tempted to make a feint of yielding to her arguments, and to pretend, for the sake of calming her sentiments that he did not really hold. But such baseness of soul is too far from him. Without for a moment imposing on Julie, such dissimulation would only have been a new torment to her. The good faith, the frankness, the union of heart, that console for so many troubles, would have been eclipsed between them. Was it by lessening his wife's esteem for him that he could reassure her? Instead of using any disguise, he tells her sincerely what he thinks, but he says it in so simple a tone, etc.—V. v. 126.

is not ancient impressions only,' said Pascal, 'which are capable of abusing us. The charm of novelty has the same power.' The prate of new-born scepticism may be as tiresome and as odious as the cant of gray orthodoxy. Religious discussion is not to be foisted upon us at every turn either by defenders or assailants. All we plead for is that when the opportunity meets the freethinker full in front, he is called upon to speak as freely as he thinks. Not more than this. A plain man has no trouble in acquiring this tact of seasonableness. We may all write what we please, because it is in the discretion of the rest of the world whether they will hearken or not. But in the family this is not so. If a man systematically intrudes disrespectful and unwelcome criticism upon a woman who retains the ancient belief, he is only showing that freethinker may be no more than bigot differently writ. It ought to be essential to no one's self-respect that he cannot consent to live with people who do not think as he thinks. We may be sure that there is something shallow and convulsive about the beliefs of a man who cannot allow his house-mates to possess their own beliefs in peace

On the other hand, it is essential to the self-respect of every one with the least love of truth that he should be free to express his opinions on every occasion, where silence would be taken for an assent which he does not really give. Still more unquestionably, he should be free from any obligation to forswear himself either directly, as by false professions, or by implication, as when he attend services, public or private, which are to him the symbol of superstition and mere spiritual phantasmagoria. The vindication of this simple right of living one's life honestly can hardly demand any heroic virtue. A little of the straightforwardness which men are accustomed to call manly, is the only quality that is needed; a little of that frank courage and determination in spiritual things, which men are usually so ready to practise towards their wives in temporal things. It must be a keen delight to a cynic to see a man who owns that he cannot bear to pain his wife by not going to church and saying prayers, yet insisting on having his own way, fearlessly thwarting her wishes, and contradicting her opinions, in every other detail, small and great, of the domestic economy.

The truth of the matter is that the painful element in companionship is not difference of opinion, but discord of temperament. The important thing is not that two people should be inspired by the same convictions, but rather that each of them should hold his and her own convictions in a high and worthy spirit. Harmony of aim, not identity of conclusion, is the secret of the sympathetic life; to stand on the same moral plane, and that, if possible, a high one; to find satisfaction in different explanations of the purpose and significance of life and the universe, and yet the same satisfaction. It is certainly not less possible to disbelieve religiously than to believe religiously. This accord of mind, this emulation in freedom and loftiness of soul, this kindred sense of the awful depth of the enigma which the one believes to be answered, and the other suspects to be for ever unanswerable—here, and not in a degrading and hypocritical conformity, is the true gratification of those spiritual sensibilities which are alleged to be so much higher in women than in men. Where such an accord exists, there may still be solicitude left in the mind of either at the

superstition or the incredulity of the other, but it will be solicitude of that magnanimous sort which is in some shape or other the inevitable and not unfruitful portion of every better nature.

If there are women who petulantly or sourly insist on more than this kind of harmony, it is probable that their system of divinity is little better than a special manifestation of shrewishness. The man is as much bound to resist that, as he is bound to resist extravagance in spending money, or any other vice of character. If he does not resist it, if he suppresses his opinions, and practises a hypocritical conformity, it must be from weakness of will and principle. Against this we have nothing to say. A considerable proportion of people, men no less than women, are born invertebrate, and they must get on as they best can. But let us at least bargain that they shall not erect the maxims of their own feebleness into a rule for those who are braver and of stronger principle than themselves. And do not let the accidental exigencies of a personal mistake be made the foundation of a general doctrine. It is a poor saying, that the world is to become void of

spiritual sincerity, because Xanthippe has a turn for respectable theology.

One or two words should perhaps be said in this place as to conformity to common religious belief in the education of children. Where the parents differ, the one being an unbeliever, the other a believer, it is almost impossible for anybody to lay down a general rule. The present writer certainly has no ambition to attempt the thorny task of compiling a manual for mixed marriages. It is perhaps enough to say that all would depend upon the nature of the beliefs which the religious person wished to inculcate. Considering that the woman has an absolutely equal moral right with the man to decide in what faith the child shall be brought up, and considering how important it is that the mother should take an active part in the development of the child's affections and impulses, the most resolute of deniers may perhaps think that the advantages of leaving the matter to her, outweigh the disadvantages of having a superstitious bias given to the young mind. In these complex cases an honest and

fair-minded man's own instincts are more likely to lead him right than any hard and fast rule. Two reserves in assenting to the wife's control of early teaching will probably suggest themselves to everybody who is in earnest about religion. First, if the theology which the woman desires to instil contains any of those wicked and depraving doctrines which neither Catholicism nor Calvinism is without, in the hands of some professors, the husband is as much justified in pressing his legal rights over the child to the uttermost, as he would be if the proposed religion demanded physical mutilation. Secondly, he will not himself take part in baptismal or other ceremonies which are to him no better than mere mummeries, nor will he ever do anything to lead his children at any age to suppose that he believes what he does not believe. Such limitations as these are commended by all considerations alike of morality and good sense.

To turn to the more normal case where either the man has had the wise forethought not to yoke himself unequally with a person of ardent belief which he does not share, or where both parents

dissent from the popular creed. Here, whatever difficulties may attend its application, the principle is surely as clear as the sun at noonday. There can be no good plea for the deliberate and formal inculcation upon the young of a number of propositions which you believe to be false. To do this is to sow tares not in your enemy's field, but in the very ground which is most precious of all others to you and most full of hope for the future. To allow it to be done merely that children may grow up in the stereotyped mould, is simply to perpetuate in new generations the present thick-sighted and dead-heavy state of our spirits. It is to do one's best to keep society for an indefinite time sapped by hollow and void professions, instead of being nourished by sincerity and whole-heartedness.[1]

[1] The common reason alleged by freethinkers for having their children brought up in the orthodox ways is that, if they were not so brought up, they would be looked on as contaminating agents whom other parents would take care to keep away from the companionship of their children. This excuse may have had some force at another time. At the present day, when belief is so weak, we doubt whether the young would be excluded from the companionship of their equals in age, merely because they had not been trained

Nor here, more than elsewhere in this chapter, are we trying to turn the family into a field of ceaseless polemic. No one who knows the stuff of which life is made, the pressure of material cares, the play of passion, the busy energising of the affections, the anxieties of health, and all the other solicitudes, generous or ignoble, which naturally absorb the days of the common multitude of men—is likely to think such an ideal either

in some of the conventional shibboleths. Even if it were so, there are certainly some ways of compensating for the disadvantages of exclusion from orthodox circles.

I have heard of a more interesting reason; namely, that the historic position of the young, relatively to the time in which they are placed, is in some sort falsified, unless they have gone through a training in the current beliefs of their age: unless they have undergone that, they miss, as it were, some of the normal antecedents. I do not think this plea will hold good. However desirable it may be that the young should know all sorts of erroneous beliefs and opinions as products of the past, it can hardly be in any degree desirable that they should take them for truths. If there were no other objection, there would be this, that the disturbance and waste of force involved in shaking off in their riper years the erroneous opinions which had been instilled into them in childhood, would more than counterbalance any advantages, whatever their precise nature may be, to be derived from having shared in their own proper persons the ungrounded notions of others.

desirable or attainable. Least of all is it desirable to give character a strong set in this polemical direction in its most plastic days. The controversial and denying humour is a different thing from the habit of being careful to know what we mean by the words we use, and what evidence there is for the beliefs we hold. It is possible to foster the latter habit without creating the former. And it is possible to bring up the young in dissent from the common beliefs around them, or in indifference to them, without engendering any of that pride in eccentricity for its own sake, which is so little likeable a quality in either young or old. There is, however, little risk of an excess in this direction. The young tremble even more than the old at the penalties of nonconformity. There is more excuse for them in this. Such penalties in their case usually come closer and in more stringent forms. Neither have they had time to find out, as their elders have or ought to have found out, what a very moderate degree of fortitude enables us to bear up against social disapproval, when we know that it is nothing more than the common form of convention.

The great object is to keep the minds of the young as open as possible in the matter of religion; to breed in them a certain simplicity and freedom from self-consciousness, in finding themselves without the religious beliefs and customs of those around them; to make them regard differences in these respects as very natural and ordinary matters, susceptible of an easy explanation. It is of course inevitable, unless they are brought up in cloistered seclusion, that they should hear much of the various articles of belief which we are anxious that they should not share. They will ask you whether the story of the creation of the universe is true; whether such and such miracles really happened; whether this person or that actually lived, and actually did all that he is said to have done. Plainly the right course is to tell them, without any agitation or excess or vehemence or too much elaboration, the simple truth in such matters exactly as it appears to one's own mind. There is no reason why they should not know the best parts of the Bible as well as they know the Iliad or Herodotus. There are many reasons why they should know them better. But one

most important condition of this is constantly overlooked by people, who like to satisfy their intellectual vanity by scepticism, and at the same time to make their comfort safe by external conformity. If the Bible is to be taught only because it is a noble and most majestic monument of literature, it should be taught as that and no more. That a man who regards it solely as supreme literature, should impress it upon the young as the supernaturally inspired word of God and the accurate record of objective occurrences, is a piece of the plainest and most shocking dishonesty. Let a youth be trained in simple and straightforward recognition of the truth that we can know, and can conjecture, nothing with any assurance as to the ultimate mysteries of things. Let his imagination and his sense of awe be fed from those springs, which are none the less bounteous because they flow in natural rather than supernatural channels. Let him be taught the historic place and source of the religions which he is not bound to accept, unless the evidence for their authority by and by brings him to another mind. A boy or girl trained in this way has an infinitely

better chance of growing up with the true spirit and leanings of religion implanted in the character, than if they had been educated in formulæ which they could not understand, by people who do not believe them.

The most common illustration of a personal mistake being made the base of a general doctrine, is found in the case of those who, after committing themselves for life to the profession of a given creed, awake to the shocking discovery that the creed has ceased to be true for them. The action of a popular modern story, Mrs. Gaskell's *North and South*, turns upon the case of a clergyman whose faith is overthrown, and who in consequence abandons his calling, to his own serious material detriment and under circumstances of severe suffering to his family. I am afraid that current opinion, especially among the cultivated class, would condemn such a sacrifice as a piece of misplaced scrupulosity. No man, it would be said, is called upon to proclaim his opinions, when to do so will cost him the means of subsistence. This will depend upon the value which he sets upon the opinions that he has to proclaim. If such a

proposition is true, the world must efface its habit of admiration for the martyrs and heroes of the past, who embraced violent death rather than defile themselves by a lying confession. Or is present heroism ridiculous, and only past heroism admirable? However, nobody has a right to demand the heroic from all the world; and if to publish his dissent from the opinions which he nominally holds would reduce a man to beggary, human charity bids us say as little as may be. We may leave such men to their unfortunate destiny, hoping that they will make what good use of it may be possible. *Non ragioniam di lor.* These cases only show the essential and profound immorality of the priestly profession—in all its forms, and no matter in connection with what church or what dogma—which makes a man's living depend on his abstaining from using his mind, or concealing the conclusions to which use of his mind has brought him. The time will come when society will look back on the doctrine, that they who serve the altar should live by the altar, as a doctrine of barbarism and degradation.

But if one, by refusing to offer a pinch of incense to the elder gods, should thus strip himself of a marked opportunity of exerting an undoubtedly useful influence over public opinion, or over a certain section of society, is he not justified in compromising to the extent necessary to preserve this influence? Instead of answering this directly, we would make the following remarks. First, it can seldom be clear in times like our own that religious heterodoxy must involve the loss of influence in other than religious spheres. The apprehension that it will do so is due rather to timorousness and a desire to find a fair reason for the comforts of silence and reserve. If a teacher has anything to tell the world in science, philosophy, history, the world will not be deterred from listening to him by knowing that he does not walk in the paths of conventional theology. Second, what influence can a man exert, that should seem to him more useful than that of a protester against what he counts false opinions, in the most decisive and important of all regions of thought? Surely if any one is persuaded, whether rightly or wrongly, that his fellows are expending the best part of

their imaginations and feelings on a dream and a delusion, and that by so doing moreover they are retarding to an indefinite degree the wider spread of light and happiness, then nothing that he can tell them about chemistry or psychology or history can in his eyes be comparable in importance to the duty of telling them this. There is no advantage nor honest delight in influence, if it is only to be exerted in the sphere of secondary objects, and at the cost of the objects which ought to be foremost in the eyes of serious people. In truth the men who have done most for the world have taken very little heed of influence. They have sought light, and left their influence to fare as it might list. Can we not imagine the mingled mystification and disdain with which a Spinosa or a Descartes, a Luther or a Pascal, would have listened to an exhortation in our persuasive modern manner on the niceties of the politic and the social obligation of pious fraud? It is not given to many to perform the achievements of such giants as these, but every one may help to keep the standard of intellectual honesty at a lofty pitch, and what better service can a man

render than to furnish the world with an example of faithful dealing with his own conscience and with his fellows? This at least is the one talent that is placed in the hands of the obscurest of us all.[1]

And what is this smile of the world, to win which we are bidden to sacrifice our moral manhood; this frown of the world, whose terrors are more awful than the withering up of truth and the slow going out of light within the souls of us?

[1] Miss Martineau has an excellent protest against 'the dereliction of principle shown in supposing that any "Cause" can be of so much importance as fidelity to truth, or can be important at all otherwise than in its relation to truth which wants vindicating. It reminds me of an incident which happened when I was in America, at the time of the severest trials of the Abolitionists. A pastor from the southern States lamented to a brother clergyman in the North the introduction of the Anti-slavery question, because the views of their sect were "getting on so well before!" "Getting on!" cried the northern minister. "What is the use of getting your vessel on when you have thrown both captain and cargo overboard?" Thus, what signifies the pursuit of any one reform, like those specified,—Anti-slavery and the Woman question,—when the freedom which is the very soul of the controversy, the very principle of the movement,—is mourned over in any other of its many manifestations? The only effectual advocates of such reforms as those are people who follow truth wherever it leads.'—*Autobiography*, ii. 442.

Consider the triviality of life and conversation and purpose, in the bulk of those whose approval is held out for our prize and the mark of our high calling. Measure, if you can, the empire over them of prejudice unadulterated by a single element of rationality, and weigh, if you can, the huge burden of custom, unrelieved by a single leavening particle of fresh thought. Ponder the share which selfishness and love of ease have in the vitality and the maintenance of the opinions that we are forbidden to dispute. Then how pitiful a thing seems the approval or disapproval of these creatures of the conventions of the hour, as one figures the merciless vastness of the universe of matter sweeping us headlong through viewless space; as one hears the wail of misery that is for ever ascending to the deaf gods; as one counts the little tale of the years that separate us from eternal silence. In the light of these things, a man should surely dare to live his small span of life with little heed of the common speech upon him or his life, only caring that his days may be full of reality, and his conversation of truth-speaking and wholeness.

Those who think conformity in the matters of which we have been speaking harmless and unimportant, must do so either from indifference or else from despair. It is difficult to convince any one who is possessed by either one or other of these two evil spirits. Men who have once accepted them, do not easily relinquish philosophies that relieve their professors from disagreeable obligations of courage and endeavour. To the indifferent person one can say nothing We can only acquiesce in that deep and terrible scripture, 'He that is filthy, let him be filthy still.' To those who despair of human improvement or the spread of light in the face of the huge mass of brute prejudice, we can only urge that the enormous weight and the firm hold of baseless prejudice and false commonplace are the very reasons which make it so important that those who are not of the night nor of the darkness should the more strenuously insist on living their own lives in the daylight. To those, finally, who do not despair, but think that the new faith will come so slowly that it is not worth while for the poor mortal of a day to make himself a martyr,

we may suggest that the new faith when it comes will be of little worth, unless it has been shaped by generations of honest and fearless men, and unless it finds in those who are to receive it an honest and fearless temper. Our plea is not for a life of perverse disputings or busy proselytising, but only that we should learn to look at one another with a clear and steadfast eye, and march forward along the paths we choose with firm step and erect front. The first advance towards either the renovation of one faith or the growth of another, must be the abandonment of those habits of hypocritical conformity and compliance which have filled the air of the England of to-day with gross and obscuring mists.

CHAPTER V.

THE REALISATION OF OPINION.

A PERSON who takes the trouble to form his own opinions and beliefs will feel that he owes no responsibility to the majority for his conclusions. If he is a genuine lover of truth, if he is inspired by the divine passion for seeing things as they are, and a divine abhorrence of holding ideas which do not conform to the facts, he will be wholly independent of the approval or assent of the persons around him. When he proceeds to apply his beliefs in the practical conduct of life, the position is different. There are now good reasons why his attitude should be in some ways less inflexible. The society in which he is placed is a very ancient and composite growth. The people from whom he dissents have not come by their opinions, customs, and institutions by a process of mere haphazard. These opinions and customs

all had their origin in a certain real or supposed fitness. They have a certain depth of root in the lives of a proportion of the existing generation. Their fitness for satisfying human needs may have vanished, and their congruity with one another may have come to an end. That is only one side of the truth. The most zealous propagandism cannot penetrate to them. The quality of bearing to be transplanted from one kind of soil and climate to another is not very common, and it is far from being inexhaustible even where it exists.

In common language we speak of a generation as something possessed of a kind of exact unity, with all its parts and members one and homogeneous. Yet very plainly it is not this. It is a whole, but a whole in a state of constant flux. Its factors and elements are eternally shifting. It is not one, but many generations. Each of the seven ages of man is neighbour to all the rest. The column of the veterans is already staggering over into the last abyss, while the column of the newest recruits is forming with all its nameless and uncounted hopes. To each its tradition, its tendency, its possibilities. Only a proportion of each in one society can have

nerve enough to grasp the banner of a new truth, and endurance enough to bear it along rugged and untrodden ways.

And then, as we have said, one must remember the stuff of which life is made. One must consider what an overwhelming preponderance of the most tenacious energies and most concentrated interests of a society must be absorbed between material cares and the solicitude of the affections. It is obviously unreasonable to lose patience and quarrel with one's time, because it is tardy in throwing off its institutions and beliefs, and slow to achieve the transformation which is the problem in front of it. Men and women have to live. The task for most of them is arduous enough to make them well pleased with even such imperfect shelter as they find in the use and wont of daily existence. To insist on a whole community being made at once to submit to the reign of new practices and new ideas, which have just begun to commend themselves to the most advanced speculative intelligence of the time,—this, even if it were a possible process, would do much to make life impracticable and to hurry on social dissolution.

'It cannot be too emphatically asserted,' as has been said by one of the most influential of modern thinkers, 'that this policy of compromise, alike in institutions, in actions, and in beliefs, which especially characterises English life, is a policy essential to a society going through the transitions caused by continued growth and development. Ideas and institutions proper to a past social state, but incongruous with the new social state that has grown out of it, surviving into this new social state they have made possible, and disappearing only as this new social state establishes its own ideas and institutions, are necessarily, during their survival, in conflict with these new ideas and institutions—necessarily furnish elements of contradiction in men's thoughts and deeds. And yet, as for the carrying on of social life, the old must continue so long as the new is not ready, this perpetual compromise is an indispensable accompaniment of a normal development.'[1]

Yet we must not press this argument, and the state of feeling that belongs to it, further than they may be fairly made to go. The danger in most

[1] *The Study of Sociology*, p. 396.

natures lies on this side, for on this side our love of ease works, and our prejudices. The writer in the passage we have just quoted is describing compromise as a natural state of things, the resultant of divergent forces. He is not professing to define its conditions or limits as a practical duty. Nor is there anything in his words, or in the doctrine of social evolution of which he is the most elaborate and systematic expounder, to favour that deliberate sacrifice of truth, either in search or in expression, against which our two previous chapters were meant to protest.[1] When Mr. Spencer talks of a new social state establishing its own ideas, of course he means, and can only mean, that men and women establish their own ideas, and to do that, it is obvious that they must at one time or another have conceived them without any special friendliness of reference to the

[1] No one, for instance, has given more forcible or decisive expression than Mr. Spencer has done to the duty of not passively accepting the current theology. See his *First Principles*, pt. i. ch. vi. § 34; paragraph beginning,—'Whoever hesitates to utter that which he thinks the highest truth, lest it should be too much in advance of the time, may reassure himself by looking at his acts from an impersonal point of view,' etc.

old ideas, which they were in the fulness of time to supersede. Still less, of course, can a new social state ever establish its ideas, unless the persons who hold them confess them openly, and give to them an honest and effective adherence.

Every discussion of the more fundamental principles of conduct must contain, expressly or by implication, some general theory of the nature and constitution of the social union. Let us state in a few words that which seems to command the greatest amount both of direct and analogical evidence in our time. It is perhaps all the more important to discuss our subject with immediate and express reference to this theory, because it has become in some minds a plea for a kind of philosophic indifference towards any policy of Thorough, as well as an excuse for systematic abstention from vigorous and downright courses of action.

A progressive society is now constantly and justly compared to a growing organism. Its vitality in this aspect consists of a series of changes in ideas and institutions. These changes arise spontaneously from the operation of the whole

body of social conditions, external and internal. The understanding and the affections and desires are always acting on the domestic, political, and economic ordering. They influence the religious sentiment. They touch relations with societies outside. In turn they are constantly being acted on by all these elements. In a society progressing in a normal and uninterrupted course, this play and interaction is the sign and essence of life. It is, as we are so often told, a long process of new adaptations and re-adaptations; of the modification of tradition and usage by truer ideas and improved institutions. There may be, and there are, epochs of rest, when this modification in its active and demonstrative shape slackens or ceases to be visible. But even then the modifying forces are only latent. Further progress depends on the revival of their energy, before there has been time for the social structure to become ossified and inelastic. The history of civilisation is the history of the displacement of old conceptions by new ones more conformable to the facts. It is the record of the removal of old institutions and ways of living, in favour of others of greater convenience and

ampler capacity, at once multiplying and satisfying human requirements.

Now compromise, in view of the foregoing theory of social advance, may be of two kinds, and of these two kinds one is legitimate and the other not. It may stand for two distinct attitudes of mind, one of them obstructive and the other not. It may mean the deliberate suppression or mutilation of an idea, in order to make it congruous with the traditional idea or the current prejudice on the given subject, whatever that may be. Or else it may mean a rational acquiescence in the fact that the bulk of your contemporaries are not yet prepared either to embrace the new idea, or to change their ways of living in conformity to it. In the one case, the compromiser rejects the highest truth, or dissembles his own acceptance of it. In the other, he holds it courageously for his ensign and device, but neither forces nor expects the whole world straightway to follow. The first prolongs the duration of the empire of prejudice, and retards the arrival of improvement. The second does his best to abbreviate the one, and to hasten and make definite the other, yet he

does not insist on hurrying changes which, to be effective, would require the active support of numbers of persons not yet ripe for them. It is legitimate compromise to say:—'I do not expect you to execute this improvement, or to surrender that prejudice, in my time. But at any rate it shall not be my fault if the improvement remains unknown or rejected. There shall be one man at least who has surrendered the prejudice, and who does not hide that fact.' It is illegitimate compromise to say:—'I cannot persuade you to accept my truth; therefore I will pretend to accept your falsehood.'

That this distinction is as sound on the evolutional theory of society as on any other is quite evident. It would be odd if the theory which makes progress depend on modification forbade us to attempt to modify. When it is said that the various successive changes in thought and institution present and consummate themselves spontaneously, no one means by spontaneity that they come to pass independently of human effort and volition. On the contrary, this energy of the members of the society is one of the spontaneous

elements. It is quite as indispensable as any other of them, if indeed it be not more so. Progress depends upon tendencies and forces in a community. But of these tendencies and forces, the organs and representatives must plainly be found among the men and women of the community, and cannot possibly be found anywhere else. Progress is not automatic, in the sense that if we were all to be cast into a deep slumber for the space of a generation, we should awake to find ourselves in a greatly improved social state. The world only grows better, even in the moderate degree in which it does grow better, because people wish that it should, and take the right steps to make it better. Evolution is not a force, but a process; not a cause, but a law. It explains the source, and marks the immovable limitations, of social energy. But social energy itself can never be superseded either by evolution or by anything else.

The reproach of being impracticable and artificial attaches by rights not to those who insist on resolute, persistent, and uncompromising efforts to remove abuses, but to a very different class—to

those, namely, who are credulous enough to suppose that abuses and bad customs and wasteful ways of doing things will remove themselves. This credulity, which is a cloak for indolence or ignorance or stupidity, overlooks the fact that there are bodies of men, more or less numerous, attached by every selfish interest they have to the maintenance of these abusive customs. 'A plan,' says Bentham, 'may be said to be too good to be practicable, where, without adequate inducement in the shape of personal interest, it requires for its accomplishment that some individual or class of individuals shall have made a sacrifice of his or their personal interest to the interest of the whole. When it is on the part of a body of men or a multitude of individuals taken at random that any such sacrifice is reckoned upon, then it is that in speaking of the plan the term *Utopian* may without impropriety be applied.' And this is the very kind of sacrifice which must be anticipated by those who so misunderstand the doctrine of evolution as to believe that the world is improved by some mystic and self-acting social discipline, which dispenses with the necessity of pertinacious attack upon

institutions that have outlived their time, and interests that have lost their justification.

We are thus brought to the position—to which, indeed, bare observation of actual occurrences might well bring us, if it were not for the clouding disturbances of selfishness, or of a true philosophy of society wrongly applied—that a society can only pursue its normal course by means of a certain progression of changes, and that these changes can only be initiated by individuals or very small groups of individuals. The progressive tendency can only be a tendency, it can only work its way through the inevitable obstructions around it, by means of persons who are possessed by the special progressive idea. Such ideas do not spring up uncaused and unconditioned in vacant space. They have had a definite origin and ordered antecedents. They are in direct relation with the past. They present themselves to one person or little group of persons rather than to another, because circumstances, or the accident of a superior faculty of penetration, have placed the person or group in the way of such ideas. In matters of social improvement the most common reason why one hits

upon a point of progress and not another, is that the one happens to be more directly touched than the other by the unimproved practice. Or he is one of those rare intelligences, active, alert, inventive, which by constitution or training find their chief happiness in thinking in a disciplined and serious manner how things can be better done. In all cases the possession of a new idea, whether practical or speculative, only raises into definite speech what others have needed without being able to make their need articulate. This is the principle on which experience shows us that fame and popularity are distributed. A man does not become celebrated in proportion to his general capacity, but because he does or says something which happened to need doing or saying at the moment.

This brings us directly to our immediate subject. For such a man is the holder of a trust. It is upon him and those who are like him that the advance of a community depends. If he is silent, then repair is checked, and the hurtful elements of worn-out beliefs and waste institutions remain to enfeeble the society, just as the retention of waste

products enfeebles or poisons the body. If in a spirit of modesty which is often genuine, though it is often only a veil for love of ease, he asks why he rather than another should speak, why he before others should refuse compliance and abstain from conformity, the answer is that though the many are ultimately moved, it is always one who is first to leave the old encampment. If the maxim of the compromiser were sound, it ought to be capable of universal application. Nobody has a right to make an apology for himself in this matter, which he will not allow to be valid for others. If one has a right to conceal his true opinions, and to practice equivocal conformities, then all have a right. One plea for exemption is in this case as good as another, and no better. That he has married a wife, that he has bought a yoke of oxen and must prove them, that he has bidden guests to a feast—one excuse lies on the same level as the rest. All are equally worthless as answers to the generous solicitation of enlightened conscience. Suppose, then, that each man on whom in turn the new ideas dawned were to borrow the compromiser's plea and imitate his example. We

know what would happen. The exploit in which no one will consent to go first, remains unachieved. You wait until there are persons enough agreeing with you to form an effective party? But how are the members of the band to know one another, if all are to keep their dissent from the old, and their adherence to the new, rigorously private? And how many members constitute the innovating band an effective force! When one-half of the attendants at a church are unbelievers, will that warrant us in ceasing to attend, or shall we tarry until the dissemblers number two-thirds? Conceive the additions which your caution has made to the moral integrity of the community in the meantime. Measure the enormous hindrances that will have been placed in the way of truth and improvement, when the day at last arrives on which you and your two-thirds take heart to say that falsehood and abuse have now reached their final term, and must at length be swept away into the outer darkness. Consider how much more terrible the shock of change will be when it does come, and how much less able will men be to meet it, and to emerge successfully from it.

Perhaps the compromiser shrinks, not because he fears to march alone, but because he thinks that the time has not yet come for the progressive idea which he has made his own, and for whose triumph one day he confidently hopes. This plea may mean two wholly different states of the case. The time has not yet come for what? For making those positive changes in life or institution, which the change in idea must ultimately involve? That is one thing. Or for propagating, elaborating, enforcing the new idea, and strenuously doing all that one can to bring as many people as possible to a state of theory, which will at last permit the requisite change in practice to be made with safety and success? This is another and entirely different thing. The time may not have come for the first of these two courses. The season may not be advanced enough for us to push on to active conquest. But the time has always come, and the season is never unripe, for the announcement of the fruitful idea.

We must go further than that. In so far as it can be done by one man without harming his neighbours, the time has always come for the

realisation of an idea. When the change in way of living or in institution is one which requires the assent and co-operation of numbers of people, it may clearly be a matter for question whether men enough are ready to yield assent and co-operation. But the expression of the necessity of the change and the grounds of it, though it may not always be appropriate, can never be premature, and for these reasons. The fact of a new idea having come to one man is a sign that it is in the air. The innovator is as much the son of his generation as the conservative. Heretics have as direct a relation to antecedent conditions as the orthodox. Truth, said Bacon, has been rightly named the daughter of Time. The new idea does not spring up uncaused and by miracle. If it has come to me, there must be others to whom it has only just missed coming. If I have found my way to the light, there must be others groping after it very close in my neighbourhood. My discovery is their goal. They are prepared to receive the new truth, which they were not prepared to find for themselves. The fact that the mass are not yet ready to receive, any more than to find, is no

reason why the possessor of the new truth should run to hide under a bushel the candle which has been lighted for him. If the time has not come for them, at least it has come for him. No man can ever know whether his neighbours are ready for change or not. He has all the following certainties, at least:—that he himself is ready for the change; that he believes it would be a good and beneficent one; that unless some one begins the work of preparation, assuredly there will be no consummation; and that if he declines to take a part in the matter, there can be no reason why every one else in turn should not decline in like manner, and so the work remain for ever unperformed. The compromiser who blinds himself to all these points, and acts just as if the truth were not in him, does for ideas with which he agrees, the very thing which the acute persecutor does for ideas which he dislikes—he extinguishes beginnings and kills the germs.

The consideration on which so many persons rely, that an existing institution, though destined to be replaced by a better, performs useful func-

tions provisionally, is really not to the point. It is an excellent reason why the institution should not be removed or fundamentally modified, until public opinion is ripe for the given piece of improvement. But it is no reason at all why those who are anxious for the improvement, should speak and act just as they would do if they thought the change perfectly needless and undesirable. It is no reason why those who allow the provisional utility of a belief or an institution or a custom of living, should think solely of the utility and forget the equally important element of its provisionalness. For the fact of its being provisional is the very ground why every one who perceives this element, should set himself to act accordingly. It is the ground why he should set himself, in other words, to draw opinion in every way open to him—by speech, by voting, by manner of life and conduct—in the direction of new truth and the better practice. Let us not, because we deem a thing to be useful for the hour, act as if it were to be useful for ever. The people who selfishly seek to enjoy as much comfort and ease as they can in an existing state of things, with

the desperate maxim, 'After us, the deluge,' are not any worse than those who cherish present comfort and ease and take the world as it comes, in the fatuous and self-deluding hope, 'After us, the millennium.' Those who make no sacrifice to avert the deluge, and those who make none to hasten their millennium, are on the same moral level. And the former have at least the quality of being no worse than their avowed principle, while the latter nullify their pretended hopes by conformities which are only proper either to profound social contentment, or to profound social despair. Nay, they seem to think that there is some merit in this merely speculative hopefulness. They act as if they supposed that to be very sanguine about the general improvement of mankind, is a virtue that relieves them from taking trouble about any improvement in particular.

If those who defend a given institution are doing their work well, that furnishes the better reason why those who disapprove of it and disbelieve in its enduring efficacy, should do their work well also. Take the Christian churches, for instance. Assume, if you will, that they are

serving a variety of useful functions. If that were all, it would be a reason for conforming. But we are speaking of those for whom the matter does not end here. If you are convinced that the dogma is not true; that a steadily increasing number of persons are becoming aware that it is not true; that its efficacy as a basis of spiritual life is being lowered in the same degree as its credibility; that both dogma and church must be slowly replaced by higher forms of faith, if not also by more effective organisations; then, all who hold such views as these have as distinctly a function in the community as the ministers and upholders of the churches, and the zeal of the latter is simply the most monstrously untenable apology that could be invented for dereliction of duty by the former.

If the orthodox to some extent satisfy certain of the necessities of the present, there are other necessities of the future which can only be satisfied by those who now pass for heretical. The plea which we are examining, if it is good for the purpose for which it is urged, would have to be expressed in this way:—The institution is work-

ing as perfectly as it can be made to do, or as any other in its place would be likely to do, and therefore I will do nothing by word or deed towards meddling with it. Those who think this, and act accordingly, are the consistent conservatives of the community. If a man takes up any position short of this, his conformity, acquiescence, and inertia at once become inconsistent and culpable. For unless the institution or belief is entirely adequate, it must be the duty of all who have satisfied themselves that it is not so, to recognise its deficiences, and at least to call attention to them, even if they lack opportunity or capacity to suggest remedies. Now we are dealing with persons who, from the hypothesis, do not admit that this or that factor in an existing social state secures all the advantages which might be secured if instead of that factor there were some other. We are speaking of all the various kinds of dissidents, who think that the current theology, or an established church, or a monarchy, or an oligarchic republic, is a bad thing and a lower form, even at the moment while they attribute provisional merit to it. They can mean

nothing by classing each of these as bad things, except that they either bring with them certain serious drawbacks, or exclude certain valuable advantages. The fact that they perform their functions well, such as they are, leaves the fundamental vice or defect of these functions just where it was. If any one really thinks that the current theology involves depraved notions of the supreme impersonation of good, restricts and narrows the intelligence, misdirects the religious imagination, and has become powerless to guide conduct, then how does the circumstance that it happens not to be wholly and unredeemedly bad in its influence, relieve our dissident from all care or anxiety as to the points in which, as we have seen, he does count it inadequate and mischievous? Even if he thinks it does more good than harm—a position which must be very difficult for one who believes the common supernatural conception of it to be entirely false—even then, how is he discharged from the duty of stigmatising the harm which he admits that it does?

Again, take the case of the English monarchy. Grant, if you will, that this institution has a

certain function, and that by the present chief magistrate this function is estimably performed. Yet if we are of those who believe that in the stage of civilisation which England has reached in other matters, the monarchy must be either obstructive and injurious, or else merely decorative; and that a merely decorative monarchy tends in divers ways to engender habits of abasement, to nourish lower social ideals, to lessen a high civil self-respect in the community; then it must surely be our duty not to lose any opportunity of pressing these convictions. To do this is not necessarily to act as if one were anxious for the immediate removal of the throne and the crown into the museum of political antiquities. We may have no urgent practical solicitude in this direction, on the intelligible principle that a free people always gets as good a kind of government as it deserves. Our conviction is not, on the present hypothesis, that monarchy ought to be swept away in England, but that monarchy produces certain mischievous consequences to the public spirit of the community. And so what we are bound to do is to take care not to conceal

this conviction; to abstain scrupulously from all kinds of action and observance, public or private, which tend ever so remotely to foster the ignoble and degrading elements that exist in a court and spread from it outwards; and to use all the influence we have, however slight it may be, in leading public opinion to a right attitude of contempt and dislike for these ignoble and degrading elements, and the conduct engendered by them. A policy like this does not interfere with the advantages of the monarchy, such as they are asserted to be, and it has the effect of making what are supposed to be its disadvantages as little noxious as possible. The question whether we can get others to agree with us is not relevant. If we were eager for instant overthrow, it would be the most relevant of all questions. But we are in the preliminary stage, the stage for acting on opinion. The fact that others do not yet share our opinions, is the very reason for our action. We can only bring them to agree with us, if it be possible on any terms, by persistency in our principles. This persistency, in all but either very timid or very vulgar natures, always has been

and always will be independent of external assent or co-operation. The history of success, as we can never too often repeat to ourselves, is the history of minorities. And what is more, it is for the most part the history of insurrection exactly against what the worldly spirits of the time, whenever it may have been, deemed mere trifles and accidents, with which sensible men should on no account dream of taking the trouble to quarrel.

'Halifax,' says Macaulay, 'was in speculation a strong republican and did not conceal it. He often made hereditary monarchy and aristocracy the subjects of his keen pleasantry, while he was fighting the battles of the court and obtaining for himself step after step in the peerage.' We are perfectly familiar with this type, both in men who have, and men who have not, such brilliant parts as Halifax. Such men profess to nourish high ideals of life, of character, of social institutions. Yet they never think of these ideals, when they are deciding what is practically attainable. One would like to ask them what purpose is served by an ideal, if it is not to make a guide for practice and a landmark in dealing with the real. A man's

loftiest and most ideal notions must be of a singularly ethereal and, shall we not say, senseless kind, if he can never see how to take a single step that may tend in the slightest degree towards making them more real. If an ideal has no point of contact with what exists, it is probably not much more than the vapid outcome of intellectual or spiritual self-indulgence. If it has such a point of contact, then there is sure to be something which a man can do towards the fulfilment of his hopes. He cannot substitute a new national religion for the old, but he can at least do something to prevent people from supposing that the adherents of the old are more numerous than they really are, and something to show them that good ideas are not all exhausted by the ancient forms. He cannot transform a monarchy into a republic, but he can make sure that one citizen at least shall aim at republican virtues, and abstain from the debasing complaisance of the crowd.

'It is a very great mistake, said Burke, many years before the French Revolution is alleged, and most unreasonably alleged, to have alienated him

from liberalism: 'it is a very great mistake to imagine that mankind follow up practically any speculative principle, either of government or of freedom, as far as it will go in argument and logical illation. All government, indeed every human benefit and enjoyment, every virtue, and every prudent act, is founded on compromise and barter. We balance inconveniences; we give and take;—we remit some rights that we may enjoy others. . Man acts from motives relative to his interests; and not on metaphysical speculations.'[1] These are the words of wisdom and truth, if we can be sure that men will interpret them in all the fulness of their meaning, and not be content to take only that part of the meaning which falls in with the dictates of their own love of ease. In France such words ought to be printed in capitals on the front of every newspaper, and written up in letters of burnished gold over each faction of the Assembly, and on the door of every bureau in the Administration. In England they need a commentary which shall bring out the very simple truth, that compromise and barter do not

[1] *Speech on Conciliation with America.*

mean the undisputed triumph of one set of principles. Nor, on the other hand, do they mean the mutilation of both sets of principles, with a view to producing a *tertium quid* that shall involve the disadvantages of each, without securing the advantages of either. What Burke means is that we ought never to press our ideas up to their remotest logical issues, without reference to the conditions in which we are applying them. In politics we have an art. Success in politics, as in every other art, obviously before all else implies both knowledge of the material with which we have to deal, and also such concession as is necessary to the qualities of the material. Above all, in politics we have an art in which development depends upon small modifications. That is the true side of the conservative theory. To hurry on after logical perfection is to show one's self ignorant of the material of that social structure with which the politician has to deal. To disdain anything short of an organic change in thought or institution is infatuation. To be willing to make such changes too frequently, even when they are possible, is foolhardiness. That fatal French

saying about small reforms being the worst enemies of great reforms is, in the sense in which it is commonly used, a formula of social ruin.

On the other hand, let us not forget that there is a sense in which this very saying is profoundly true. A small and temporary improvement may really be the worst enemy of a great and permanent improvement, unless the first is made on the lines and in the direction of the second. And so it may, if it be successfully palmed off upon a society as actually being the second. In such a case as this, and our legislation presents instances of the kind, the small reform, if it be not made with reference to some large progressive principle and with a view to further extension of its scope, makes it all the more difficult to return to the right line and direction when improvement is again demanded. To take an example which is now very familiar to us all. The Education Act of 1870 was of the nature of a small reform. No one pretends that it is anything approaching to a final solution of a complex problem. But the government insisted, whether rightly or wrongly, that their Act was as large a measure as public

opinion was at that moment ready to support. At the same time it was clearly agreed among the government and the whole of the party at their backs, that at some time or other, near or remote, if public instruction was to be made genuinely effective, the private, voluntary, or denominational system would have to be replaced by a national system. To prepare for this ultimate replacement was one of the points to be most steadily borne in mind, however slowly and tentatively the process might be conducted. Instead of that, the authors of the Act deliberately introduced provisions for extending and strengthening the very system which will have eventually to be superseded. They thus by their small reform made the future great reform the more difficult of achievement. Assuredly this is not the compromise and barter, the give and take, which Burke intended. What Burke means by compromise, and what every true statesman understands by it, is that it may be most inexpedient to meddle with an institution merely because it does not harmonise with 'argument and logical illation.' This is a very different thing from

giving new comfort and strength with one hand, to an institution whose death-warrant you pretend to be signing with the other.

In a different way the second possible evil of a small reform may be equally mischievous—where the small reform is represented as settling the question. The mischief here is not that it takes us out of the progressive course, as in the case we have just been considering, but that it sets men's minds in a posture of contentment, which is not justified by the amount of what has been done, and which makes it all the harder to arouse them to new effort when the inevitable time arrives.

In these ways, then, compromise may mean, not acquiescence in an instalment, on the ground that the time is not ripe to yield us more than an instalment, but either the acceptance of the instalment as final, followed by the virtual abandonment of hope and effort; or else it may mean a mistaken reversal of direction, which augments the distance that has ultimately to be traversed. In either of these senses, the small reform may become the enemy of the great one. But a right conception of political method, based

on a rightly interpreted experience of the conditions on which societies unite progress with order, leads the wise conservative to accept the small change, lest a worse thing befall him, and the wise innovator to seize the chance of a small improvement, while incessantly working in the direction of great ones. The important thing is that throughout the process neither of them should lose sight of his ultimate ideal; nor fail to look at the detail from the point of view of the whole; nor allow the near particular to bulk so unduly large as to obscure the general and distant.

If the process seems intolerably slow, we may correct our impatience by looking back upon the past. People seldom realise the enormous period of time which each change in men's ideas requires for its full accomplishment. We speak of these changes with a peremptory kind of definiteness, as if they had covered no more than the space of a few years. Thus we talk of the time of the Reformation, as we might talk of the Reform Bill or the Repeal of the Corn Duties. Yet the Reformation is the name for a movement of the mind of northern Europe, which went on for three

centuries. Then if we turn to that still more momentous set of events, the rise and establishment of Christianity, one might suppose from current speech that we could fix that within a space of half a century or so. Yet it was at least four hundred years before all the foundations of that great superstructure of doctrine and organisation were completely laid. Again, to descend to less imposing occurrences, the transition in the Eastern Empire from the old Roman system of national organisation to that other system to which we give the specific name of Byzantine,—this transition, so infinitely less important as it was than either of the two other movements, yet occupied no less than a couple of hundred years. The conditions of speech make it indispensable for us to use definite and compendious names for movements that were both tardy and complex. We are forced to name a long series of events as if they were a single event. But we lose the reality of history, we fail to recognise one of the most striking aspects of human affairs, and above all we miss that most invaluable practical lesson, the lesson of patience, unless we remember that

the great changes of history took up long periods of time which, when measured by the little life of a man, are almost colossal, like the vast changes of geology. We know how long it takes before a species of plant or animal disappears in face of a better adapted species. Ideas and customs, beliefs and institutions, have always lingered just as long in face of their successors, and the competition is not less keen nor less prolonged, because it is for one or other inevitably destined to be hopeless. History, like geology, demands the use of the imagination, and in proportion as the exercise of the historic imagination is vigorously performed in thinking of the past, will be the breadth of our conception of the changes which the future has in store for us, as well as of the length of time and the magnitude of effort required for their perfect achievement.[1]

[1] 'Toute énormité dans les esprits d'un certain ordre n'est souvent qu'une grande vue prise hors du temps et du lieu, et ne gardant aucun rapport réel avec les objets environnants. Le propre de certaines prunelles ardentes est de franchir du regard les intervalles et de les supprimer. Tantôt c'est une idée qui retarde de plusieurs siècles, et que ces vigoureux esprits se figurent encore présente et vivante ; tantôt c'est une idée qui avance, et qu'ils croient incontinent réalisable.

This much, concerning moderation in political practice. No such considerations present themselves in the matters which concern the shaping of our own lives, or the publications of our social opinions. In this region we are not imposing charges upon others, either by law or otherwise. We therefore owe nothing to the prejudices or habits of others. If any one sets serious value upon the point of difference between his own ideal and that which is current, if he thinks that his 'experiment in living' has promise of real worth, and that if more persons could be induced to imitate it, some portion of mankind would be thus put in possession of a better kind of happiness, then it is selling a birthright for a mess of pottage to abandon hopes so rich and generous,

M. de Couaën était ainsi; il voyait 1814 dès 1804, et de là une supériorité; mais il jugeait 1814 possible dès 1804 ou 1805, et de là tout un chimérique entassement.—Voilà un point blanc à l'horizon, chacun jurerait que c'est un nuage. "C'est une montagne," dit le voyageur à l'œil d'aigle; mais s'il ajoute: "Nous y arriverons ce soir, dans deux heures;" si, à chaque heure de marche, il crie avec emportement: "Nous y sommes," et le veut démontrer, il choque les voisins avec sa poutre, et donne l'avantage aux yeux moins perçants et plus habitués à la plaine.'—Ste. Beuve's *Volupté*, p. 262

merely in order to avoid the passing and casual penalties of social disapproval. And there is a double evil in this kind of flinching from obedience to the voice of our better selves, whether it takes the form of absolute suppression of what we think and hope, or only of timorous and mutilated presentation. We lose not only the possible advantage of the given change. Besides that, we lose also the certain advantage of maintaining or increasing the amount of conscientiousness in the world. And everybody can perceive the loss incurred in a society where diminution of the latter sort takes place. The advance of the community depends not merely on the improvement and elevation of its moral maxims, but also on the quickening of moral sensibility. The latter work has mostly been effected, when it has been effected on a large scale, by teachers of a certain singular personal quality. They do nothing to improve the theory of conduct, but they have the art of stimulating men to a more enthusiastic willingness to rise in daily practice to the requirements of whatever theory they may accept. The love of virtue, of duty, of holiness, or by whatever name we call

this powerful sentiment, exists in the majority of men, where it exists at all, independently of argument. It is a matter of affection, sympathy, association, aspiration. Hence, even while, in quality, sense of duty is a stationary factor, it is constantly changing in quantity. The amount of conscience in different communities, or in the same community at different times, varies infinitely. The immediate cause of the decline of a society in the order of morals is a decline in the quantity of its conscience, a deadening of its moral sensitiveness, and not a depravation of its theoretial ethics. The Greeks became corrupt and enfeebled, not for lack of ethical science, but through the decay in the numbers of those who were actually alive to the reality and force of ethical obligations. Mahometans triumphed over Christians in the East and in Spain—if we may for a moment isolate moral conditions from the rest of the total circumstances—not because their scheme of duty was more elevated or comprehensive, but because their respect for duty was more strenuous and fervid.

The great importance of leaving this priceless

element in a community as free, as keen, and as active as possible, is overlooked by the thinkers who uphold coercion against liberty, as a saving social principle. Every act of coercion directed against an opinion or a way of living is in so far calculated to lessen the quantity of conscience in the society where such acts are practised. Of course, where ways of living interfere with the lawful rights of others, where they are not strictly self-regarding in all their details, it is necessary to force the dissidents, however strong may be their conscientious sentiment. The evil of attenuating that sentiment is smaller than the evil of allowing one set of persons to realise their own notions of happiness, at the expense of all the rest of the world. But where these notions can be realised without unlawful interference of that kind, then the forcible hindrance of such realisation is a direct weakening of the force and amount of conscience on which the community may count. There is one memorable historic case to illustrate this. Lewis XIV., in revoking the Edict of Nantes, and the author of the still more cruel law of 1724, not only violently drove out multitudes of the

most scrupulous part of the French nation; they virtually offered the most tremendous bribes to those of less stern resolution, to feign conversion to the orthodox faith. This was to treat conscience as a thing of mean value. It was to scatter to the wind with both hands the moral resources of the community. And who can fail to see the strength which would have been given to France in her hour of storm, a hundred years after the revocation of the Edict of Nantes, if her protestant sons, fortified by the training in the habits of individual responsibility which protestantism involves, had only been there to aid?

This consideration brings us to a new side of the discussion. We may seem to have been unconsciously arguing as strongly in favour of a vigorous social conservatism as of a self-asserting spirit of social improvement. All that we have been saying may appear to cut both ways. If the innovator should decline to practise silence or reserve, why should the possessor of power be less uncompromising, and why should he not impose silence by force? If the heretic ought

to be uncompromising in expressing his opinions, and in acting upon them, in the fulness of his conviction that they are right, why should not the orthodox be equally uncompromising in his resolution to stamp out the heretical notions and unusual ways of living, in the fulness of his conviction that they are thoroughly wrong? To this question the answer is that the hollow kinds of compromise are as bad in the orthodox as in the heretical. Truth has as much to gain from sincerity and thoroughness in one as in the other. But the issue between the partisans of the two opposed schools turns upon the sense which we design to give to the process of stamping out. Those who cling to the tenets of liberty limit the action of the majority, as of the minority, strictly to persuasion. Those who dislike liberty, insist that earnestness of conviction justifies either a majority or a minority in using not persuasion only, but force. I do not propose here to enter into the great question which Mr. Mill pressed anew upon the minds of this generation. His arguments are familiar to every reader, and the conclusion at which he arrived is almost taken

for a postulate in the present essay.[1] The object of these chapters is to reiterate the importance of self-assertion, tenacity, and positiveness of principle. The partisan of coercion will argue that this thesis is on one side of it a justification of persecution, and other modes of interfering with new opinions and new ways of living by force, and the strong arm of the law, and whatever other energetic means of repression may be at command. If the minority are to be uncompromising alike in seeking and realising what they take for truth, why not the majority? Now this implies two propositions. It is the same as to say, first, that earnestness of conviction is not to be distinguished from a belief in our own infallibility: second, that faith in our infallibility is necessarily bound up with intolerance.

Neither of these propositions is true. Let us take them in turn. Earnestness of conviction is perfectly compatible with a sense of liability to

[1] It is sometimes convenient to set familiar arguments down once more; so I venture to reprint in a note at the end of the chapter a short exposition of the doctrine of liberty, which I had occasion to make in considering Sir J. F. Stephen's vigorous attack on that doctrine.

error. This has been so excellently put by a former writer that we need not attempt to better his exposition. 'Every one must, of course, think his own opinions right; for if he thought them wrong, they would no longer be his opinions: but there is a wide difference between regarding ourselves as infallible, and being firmly convinced of the truth of our creed. When a man reflects on any particular doctrine, he may be impressed with a thorough conviction of the improbability or even impossibility of its being false: and so he may feel with regard to all his other opinions, when he makes them objects of separate contemplation. And yet when he views them in the aggregate, when he reflects that not a single being on the earth holds collectively the same, when he looks at the past history and present state of mankind, and observes the various creeds of different ages and nations, the peculiar modes of thinking of sects and bodies and individuals, the notions once firmly held, which have been exploded, the prejudices once universally prevalent, which have been removed, and the endless controversies which have distracted those who have made it the business of

their lives to arrive at the truth; and when he further dwells on the consideration that many of these, his fellow-creatures, have had a conviction of the justness of their respective sentiments equal to his own, he cannot help the obvious inference, that in his own opinion it is next to impossible that there is not an admixture of error; that there is an infinitely greater probability of his being wrong in some than right in all.'[1]

Of course this is not an account of the actual frame of mind of ordinary men. They never do think of their opinions in the aggregate in comparison with the collective opinions of others, nor ever draw the conclusions which such reflections would suggest. But such a frame of mind is perfectly attainable, and has often been attained, by persons of far lower than first-rate capacity. And if this is so, there is no reason why it should not be held up for the admiration and imitation of all those classes of society which profess to have opinions. It would thus become an established element in the temper of the age. Nor need we

[1] Mr. Samuel Bailey's *Essays on the Formation and Publication of Opinions*, etc., p. 138. (1826.)

fear that the result of this would be any flaccidity of conviction, or lethargy in act. A man would still be penetrated with the rightness of his own opinion on a given issue, and would still do all that he could to make it prevail in practice. But among the things which he would no longer permit himself to do, would be the forcible repression in others of any opinions, however hostile to his own, or of any kind of conduct, however widely it diverged from his own, and provided that it concerned themselves only. This widening of his tolerance would be the natural result of a rational and realised consciousness of his own general fallibility.

Next, even belief in one's own infallibility does not necessarily lead to intolerance. For it may be said that though no man in his senses would claim to be incapable of error, yet in every given case he is quite sure that he is not in error, and therefore this assurance in particular is tantamount by process of cumulation to a sense of infallibility in general. Now even if this were so, it would not of necessity either produce or justify intolerance. The certainty of the truth of your own

opinions is independent of any special idea as to the means by which others may best be brought to share them. The question between persuasion and force remains apart—unless, indeed, we may say that in societies where habits of free discussion have once begun to take root, those who are least really sure about their opinions, are often most unwilling to trust to persuasion to bring them converts, and most disposed to grasp the rude implements of coercion, whether legal or merely social. The cry, 'Be my brother, or I slay thee,' was the sign of a very weak, though very fiery, faith in the worth of fraternity. He whose faith is most assured, has the best reason for relying on persuasion, and the strongest motive to thrust from him all temptations to use angry force. The substitution of force for persuasion, among its other disadvantages, has this further drawback, from our present point of view, that it lessens the conscience of a society and breeds hypocrisy. You have not converted a man, because you have silenced him. Opinion and force belong to different elements. To think that you are able by social disapproval or other coercive means to

crush a man's opinion, is as one who should fire a blunderbuss to put out a star. The acquiescence in current notions which is secured by law or by petulant social disapproval, is as worthless and as essentially hypocritical, as the conversion of an Irish pauper to protestantism by means of soup-tickets, or that of a savage to Christianity by the gift of a string of beads. Here is the radical fallacy of those who urge that people must use promises and threats in order to encourage opinions, thoughts, and feelings which they think good, and to prevent others which they think bad. Promises and threats can influence acts. Opinions and thoughts on morals, politics, and the rest, after they have once grown in a man's mind, can no more be influenced by promises and threats than can my knowledge that snow is white or that ice is cold. You may impose penalties on me by statute for saying that snow is white, or acting as if I thought ice cold, and the penalties may affect my conduct. They will not, because they cannot, modify my beliefs in the matter by a single iota. One result therefore of intolerance is to make hypocrites. On this,

as on the rest of the grounds which vindicate the doctrine of liberty, a man who thought himself infallible either in particular or in general, from the Pope of Rome down to the editor of the daily newspaper, might still be inclined to abstain from any form of compulsion. The only reason to the contrary is that a man who is so silly as to think himself incapable of going wrong, is very likely to be too silly to perceive that coercion may be one way of going wrong.

The currency of the notion that earnest sincerity about one's opinions and ideals of conduct is inseparably connected with intolerance, is indirectly due to the predominance of legal or juristic analogies in social discussion. For one thing, the lawyer has to deal mainly with acts, and to deal with them by way of repression. His attention is primarily fixed on the deed, and only secondarily on the mind of the doer. And so a habit of thought is created, which treats opinion as something equally in the sphere of coercion with actions. At the same time it favours coercive ways of affecting opinion. Then, what is still more important, the jurist's conception of society

has its root in the relation between sovereign and subject, between lawmaker and those whom law restrains. Exertion of power on one hand, and compliance on the other—this is his type of the conditions of the social union. The fertility and advance of discussion on social issues depends on the substitution of the evolutional for the legal conception. The lawyer's type of proposition is absolute. It is also, for various reasons which need not be given here, inspired by involuntary reference to the lower, rather than to the more highly developed, social states. In the lower states law, penalties, coercion, compulsion, the strong hand, a sternly repressive public opinion, were the conditions on which the community was united and held together. But the line of thought which these analogies suggest, becomes less and less generally appropriate in social discussion, in proportion as the community becomes more complex, more various in resource. more special in its organisation, in a word, more elaborately civilised. The evolutionist's idea of society concedes to law its historic place and its actual part. But then this idea leads directly

to a way of looking at society, which makes the replacement of law by liberty a condition of reaching the higher stages of social development.

The doctrine of liberty belongs to the subject of this chapter, because it is only another way of expressing the want of connection between earnestness in realising our opinions, and anything like coercion in their favour. If it were true that aversion from compromise, in carrying out our ideas, implied the rightfulness of using all the means in our power to hinder others from carrying out ideas hostile to them, then we should have been preaching in a spirit unfavourable to the principle of liberty. Our main text has been that men should refuse to sacrifice their opinions and ways of living (in the self-regarding sphere) out of regard to the *status quo*, or the prejudices of others. And this, as a matter of course, excludes the right of forcing or wishing any one else to make such a sacrifice to us. Well, the first foundation-stone for the doctrine of liberty is to be sought in the conception of society as a growing and developing organism. This is its true base, apart from the numerous minor expediencies

which may be adduced to complete the structure of the argument. It is fundamentally advantageous that in societies which have reached our degree of complex and intricate organisation, unfettered liberty should be conceded to ideas and, within the self-regarding sphere, to conduct also. The reasons for this are of some such kind as the following. New ideas and new 'experiments in living' would not arise, if there were not a certain inadequateness in existing ideas and ways of living. They may not point to the right mode of meeting inadequateness, but they do point to the existence and consciousness of it. They originate in the social capability of growth. Society can only develop itself on condition that all such novelties (within the limit laid down, for good and valid reasons, at self-regarding conduct) are allowed to present themselves. First, because neither the legislature nor any one else can ever know for certain what novelties will prove of enduring value. Second, because even if we did know for certain that given novelties were pathological growths and not normal developments, and that they never would be of any value, still the repression neces-

sary to extirpate them would involve too serious a risk both of keeping back social growth at some other point, and of giving the direction of that growth an irreparable warp. And let us repeat once more, in proportion as a community grows more complex in its classes, divisions, and subdivisions, more intricate in its productive, commercial, or material arrangements, so does this risk very obviously wax more grave.

In the sense in which we are speaking of it, liberty is not a positive force, any more than the smoothness of a railroad is a positive force.[1] It is

[1] There is a sense, and a most important sense, in which liberty is a positive force. It is its robust and bracing influence on character, which makes wise men prize freedom and strive for the enlargement of its province. As Mr. Mill expressed this:—'It is of importance not only what men do, but what manner of men they are that do it.' Milton pointed to the positive effect of liberty on character in the following passage:—'They are not skilful considerers of human things who imagine to remove sin by removing the matter of sin. Though ye take from a covetous man his treasure, he has yet one jewel left; ye cannot bereave him of his covetousness. Banish all objects of lust, shut up all youth into the severest discipline that can be exercised in any hermitage, ye cannot make them chaste that came not thither so. Suppose we could expel sin by this means; look how much we thus expel of sin, so much we expel of

a condition. As a force, there is a sense in which it is true to call liberty a negation. As a condition, though it may still be a negation, yet it may be indispensable for the production of certain positive results. The vacuity of an exhausted receiver is not a force, but it is the indispensable condition of certain positive operations. Liberty as a force may be as impotent as its opponents allege. This does not affect its value as a preliminary or accompanying condition. The absence of a strait-waistcoat is a negation; but it is a useful condition for the activity of sane men. No doubt there must be a definite limit to this absence of external interference with conduct, and that limit will be fixed at various points by different thinkers. We are now only urging that it cannot be wisely fixed for the more complex societies by any one who has not grasped this fundamental preconception, that liberty, or the absence of coercion, or the leaving people to think, speak, and act as they please, is

virtue. And were I the chooser, a dram of well-doing should be preferred before many times as much the forcible hindrance of evil-doing. For God sure esteems the growth and completing of one virtuous person, more than the restraint of ten vicious.'

in itself a good thing. It is the object of a favourable presumption. The burden of proving it inexpedient always lies, and wholly lies, on those who wish to abridge it by coercion, whether direct or indirect.

One reason why this truth is so reluctantly admitted, is men's irrational want of faith in the self-protective quality of a highly developed and healthy community. The timid compromiser on the one hand, and the advocate of coercive restriction on the other, are equally the victims of a superfluous apprehension. The one fears to use his liberty for the same reason that makes the other fearful of permitting liberty. This common reason is the want of a sensible confidence that, in a free western community, which has reached our stage of development, religious, moral, and social novelties—provided they are tainted by no element of compulsion or interference with the just rights of others—may be trusted to find their own level. Moral and intellectual conditions are not the only motive forces in a community, nor are they even the most decisive. Political and material conditions fix the limits at which speculation can

do either good or harm. Let us take an illustration of the impotence of moral ideas to override material circumstances; and we shall venture to place this illustration somewhat fully before the reader.

There is no more important distinction between modern civilised communities and the ancient communities than the fact that the latter rested on Slavery, while the former have abolished it. Hence there can hardly be a more interesting question than this—by what agencies so prodigious a transformation of one of the fundamental conditions of society was brought about. The popular answer is of a very ready kind, and it passes quite satisfactorily. This answer is that the first great step towards free labour, the transformation of personal slavery into serfdom, was the result of the spiritual change which was wrought in men's minds by the teaching of the Church. It is unquestionable that the influence of the Church tended to mitigate the evils of slavery, to humanise the relations between master and slave, between the lord and the serf. But this is a very different thing from the radical transformation of those

relations. If we think of society as an organism, we instantly understand that so immense a change as this could not possibly have been effected without the co-operation of the other great parts of the social system, any more than a critical evolution could take place in the nutritive apparatus of an animal, without a change in the whole series of its organs. Thus in order that serfage should be evolved from slavery, and free labour again from serfage, it could not be enough that an alteration should have been wrought in men's ideas as to their common brotherhood, and the connected ideas as to the lawfulness or unlawfulness of certain human relations. There must have been an alteration also of the economic and material conditions. History confirms the expectations which we should thus have been led to entertain. The impotence of spiritual and moral agencies alone in bringing about this great metamorphosis, is shown by such facts as these. For centuries after the new faith had consolidated itself, slavery was regarded without a particle of that deep abhorrence which the possession of man by man excites in us now. In the ninth and tenth centuries the slave trade was

the most profitable branch of the commerce that was carried on in the Mediterranean. The historian tells us that, even so late as this, slaves were the principal article of European export to Africa, Syria, and Egypt, in payment for the produce of the East which was brought from those countries. It was the crumbling of the old social system which, by reducing the population, lessening the wealth, and lowering the standard of living among the free masters, tended to extinguish slavery, by diminishing the differences between the masters and their bondsmen. Again, it was certain laws enacted by the Roman government for the benefit of the imperial fisc, which first conferred rights on the slave. The same laws brought the free farmer, whose position was less satisfactory for the purposes of the revenue, down nearer and nearer to a servile condition. Again, in the ninth and tenth centuries, pestilence and famine accelerated the extinction of predial slavery by weakening the numbers of the free population. 'History,' we are told by that thoroughly competent authority, Mr. Finlay, 'affords its testimony that neither the doctrines of Christianity, nor the sentiments of

humanity, have ever yet succeeded in extinguishing slavery, where the soil could be cultivated with profit by slave labour. No Christian community of slave-holders has yet voluntarily abolished slavery. In no country where it prevailed has rural slavery ceased, until the price of productions raised by slave labour has fallen so low as to leave no profit to the slave-owner.'

The moral of all this is the tolerably obvious truth, that the prosperity of an abstract idea depends as much on the medium into which it is launched, as upon any quality of its own. Stable societies are amply furnished with force enough to resist all effort in a destructive direction. There is seldom much fear, and in our own country there is hardly any fear at all, of hasty reformers making too much way against the spontaneous conservatism which belongs to a healthy and well-organised community. If dissolvent ideas do make their way, it is because the society was already ripe for dissolution. New ideas, however ardently preached, will dissolve no society which was not already in a condition of profound disorganisation. We may be allowed just to point to two memor-

able instances, by way of illustration, though a long and elaborate discussion would be needed to bring out their full force. It has often been thought since, as it was thought by timorous reactionaries at the time, that Christianity in various ways sapped the strength of the Roman Empire, and opened the way for the barbarians. In truth, the most careful and competent students know now that the Empire slowly fell to pieces, partly because the political arrangements were vicious and inadequate, but mainly because the fiscal and economic system impoverished and depopulated one district of the vast empire after another. It was the break-up of the Empire that gave the Church its chance; not the Church that broke up the Empire. It is a mistake of the same kind to suppose that the destructive criticism of the French philosophers a hundred years ago was the great operative cause of the catastrophe which befel the old social régime. If Voltaire, Diderot, Rousseau, had never lived, or if their works had all been suppressed as soon as they were printed, their absence would have given no new life to agriculture, would not have stimulated trade, nor

replenished the bankrupt fisc, nor incorporated the privileged classes with the bulk of the nation, nor done anything else to repair an organisation of which every single part had become incompetent for its proper function. It was the material misery and the political despair engendered by the reigning system, which brought willing listeners to the feet of the teachers who framed beneficent governments on the simple principles of reason and the natural law. And these teachers only busied themselves with abstract politics, because the real situation was desperate. They had no alternative but to evolve social improvements out of their own consciousness. There was not a single sound organ in the body politic, which they could have made the starting-point of a reconstitution of a society on the base of its actual or historic structure. The mischiefs which resulted from their method are patent and undeniable. But the method was made inevitable by the curse of the old régime.[1]

[1] There is, I think, nothing in this paragraph really inconsistent with De Tocqueville's well-known and striking chapter, 'Comment les hommes de lettres devinrent les principaux hommes politiques du pays, et des effets qui en

Nor is there any instance in history of mere opinion making a breach in the essential constitution of a community, so long as the political conditions were stable and the economic or nutritive conditions sound. If some absolute monarch were to be seized by a philanthropic resolution to transform the ordering of a society which seemed to be at his disposal, he might possibly, by the perseverance of a lifetime, succeed in throwing the community into permanent confusion. Joseph II. perhaps did as much as a modern sovereign can do in this direction. Yet little came of his efforts, either for good or harm. But a man without the

résultèrent.' (*Ancien Régime*, iii. i.) Thus Sénac de Meilhan writes in 1795 :—'C'est quand la Révolution a été entamée qu'on a cherché dans Mably, dans Rousseau, des armes pour sustenter le système vers lequel entrainait l'effervescence de quelques esprits hardis. Mais ce ne sont point les auteurs que j'ai cités qui ont enflamme les têtes ; M. Necker seul a produit cet effet, et déterminé l'explosion.' . . . 'Les écrits de Voltaire ont certainement nui à la religion, et ébranlé la croyance dans un assez grand nombre ; mais ils n'ont aucun rapport avec les affaires du gouvernement, et sont plus favorables que contraires à la monarchie. . . .' Of Rousseau's *Social Contract* :—'Ce livre profond et abstrait était peu lu, et entendu de bien peu de gens.' Mably—'avait peu de vogue.' *Du Gouvernement, etc., en France*, p. 129, etc.

whole political machinery in his power need hardly labour under any apprehension that he may, by the mere force of speculative opinion, involuntarily work a corresponding mischief. If it is true that the most fervent apostles of progress usually do very little of the good on which they congratulate themselves, they ought surely on the same ground to be acquitted of much of the harm for which they are sometimes reviled. In a country of unchecked and abundant discussion, a new idea is not at all likely to make much way against the objection of its novelty, unless it is really commended by some quality of temporary or permanent value. So far therefore as the mere publication of new principles is concerned, and so far also as merely self-regarding action goes, one who has the keenest sense of social responsibility, and is most scrupulously afraid of doing anything to slacken or perturb the process of social growth, may still consistently give to the world whatever ideas he has gravely embraced. He may safely trust, if the society be in a normal condition, to its justice of assimilation and rejection. There are a few individuals for whom newness is a recommendation.

But what are these few among the many to whom newness is a stumbling-block? Old ideas may survive merely because they are old. A new one will certainly not, among a considerable body of men in a healthy social state, gain any acceptance worth speaking of, merely because it is new.

The recognition of the self-protecting quality of society is something more than a point of speculative importance. It has a direct practical influence. For it would add to the courage and intrepidity of the men who are most attached to the reigning order of things. If such men could only divest themselves of a futile and nervous apprehension, that things as they are have no root in their essential fitness and harmony, and that order consequently is ever hanging on a trembling and doubtful balance, they would not only gain by the self-respect which would be added to them and the rest of the community, but all discussion would become more robust and real. If they had a larger faith in the stability for which they profess so great an anxiety, they would be more free alike in understanding and temper to deal generously, honestly, and effectively with

those whom they count imprudent innovators. There is nothing more amusing or more instructive than to turn to the debates in parliament or the press upon some innovating proposal, after an interval since the proposal was accepted by the legislature. The flaming hopes of its friends, the wild and desperate prophecies of its antagonists, are found to be each as ill-founded as the other. The measure which was to do such vast good according to the one, such portentous evil according to the other, has done only a part of the promised good, and has done none of the threatened evil. The true lesson from this is one of perseverance and thoroughness for the improver, and one of faith in the self-protectiveness of a healthy society for the conservative. The master error of the latter is to suppose that men are moved mainly by their passions rather than their interests, that all their passions are presumably selfish and destructive, and that their own interests can seldom be adequately understood by the persons most directly concerned. How many fallacies are involved in this group of propositions, the reader may well be left to judge for himself.

We have in this chapter considered some of the limitations which are set by the conditions of society on the duty of trying to realise our principles in action. The general conclusion is in perfect harmony with that of the previous chapters. A principle, if it be sound, represents one of the larger expediencies. To abandon that for the sake of some seeming expediency of the hour, is to sacrifice the greater good for the less, on no more creditable ground than that the less is nearer. It is better to wait, and to defer the realisation of our ideas until we can realise them fully, than to defraud the future by truncating them, if truncate them we must, in order to secure a partial triumph for them in the immediate present. It is better to bear the burden of impracticableness, than to stifle conviction and to pare away principle until it becomes mere hollowness and triviality. What is the sense, and what is the morality, of postponing the wider utility to the narrower? Nothing is so sure to impoverish an epoch, to deprive conduct of nobleness, and character of elevation.

NOTE TO PAGE 242.

THE DOCTRINE OF LIBERTY.

Mr. Mill's memorable plea for social liberty was little more than an enlargement, though a very important enlargement, of the principles of the still more famous Speech for Liberty of Unlicensed Printing with which Milton ennobled English literature two centuries before. Milton contended for free publication of opinion mainly on these grounds : First, that the opposite system implied the 'grace of infallibility and incorruptibleness' in the licensers. Second, that the prohibition of bold books led to mental indolence and stagnant formalism both in teachers and congregations, producing the 'laziness of a licensing church.' Third, that it 'hinders and retards the importation of our richest merchandise, truth;' for the commission of the licenser enjoins him to let nothing pass which is not vulgarly received already, and 'if it come to prohibiting, there is not aught more likely to be prohibited than truth itself, whose first appearance to our eyes, bleared and dimmed with prejudice and custom, is more unsightly and un-

plausible than many errors, even as the person is of many a great man slight and contemptible to see to.' Fourth, that freedom is in itself an ingredient of true virtue, and 'they are not skilful considerers of human things who imagine to remove sin by removing the matter of sin; that virtue therefore, which is but a youngling in the contemplation of evil, and knows not the utmost that vice promises to her followers, and rejects it, is but a blank virtue, not a pure; her virtue is but an excremental virtue, which was the reason why our sage and serious poet Spenser, whom I dare be known to think a better teacher than Scotus or Aquinas, describing true temperance under the form of Guion, brings him in with his palmer through the cave of Mammon and the tower of earthly bliss, that he might see and know and yet abstain.'

The four grounds on which Mr. Mill contends for the necessity of freedom in the expression of opinion to the mental wellbeing of mankind, are virtually contained in these. His four grounds are, (1) that the silenced opinion may be true; (2) it may contain a portion of truth, essential to supplement the prevailing opinion; (3) vigorous contesting of opinions that are even wholly true, is the only way of preventing them from sinking to the level of uncomprehended prejudices; (4) without such contesting, the doctrine will lose its vital effect on character and conduct.

But Milton drew the line of liberty at what he

calls 'neighbouring differences, or rather indifferences.' The Arminian controversy had loosened the bonds with which the newly liberated churches of the Reformation had made haste to bind themselves again, and weakened that authority of confessions, which had replaced the older but not more intolerant authority of the universal church. Other controversies which raged during the first half of the seventeenth century,—those between catholics and protestants, between prelatists and presbyterians, between socinians and trinitarians, between latitudinarians, puritans, and sacramentalists, —all tended to weaken theological exclusiveness. This slackening, however, was no more than partial. Roger Williams, indeed, the Welsh founder of Rhode Island, preached, as early as 1631, the principles of an unlimited toleration, extending to catholics, Jews, and even infidels. Milton stopped a long way short of this. He did not mean 'tolerated popery and open superstition, which, as it extirpates all religious and civil supremacies, so itself should be extirpate, provided first that all charitable and compassionate means be used to win and regain the weak and the misled: that also which is impious or evil absolutely either against faith or manners no law can possibly permit that intends not to unlaw itself.'

Locke, writing five-and-forty years later, somewhat widened these limitations. His question was not merely

whether there should be free expression of opinion, but whether there should furthermore be freedom of worship and of religious union. He answered both questions affirmatively,—not on the semi-sceptical ground of Jeremy Taylor, which is also one of the grounds taken by Mr. Mill, that we cannot be sure that our own opinion is the true one,—but on the strength of his definition of the province of the civil magistrate. Locke held that the magistrate's whole jurisdiction reached only to civil concernments, and that 'all civil power, right, and dominion is bounded to that only care of promoting these things; and that it neither can nor ought in any manner to be extended to the saving of souls. This chiefly because the power of the civil magistrate consists only in outward force, while true and saving religion consists in the inward persuasion of the mind, without which nothing can be acceptable to God, and such is the nature of the understanding that it cannot be compelled to the belief of anything by outward force. . . . It is only light and evidence that can work a change in men's opinions; and that light can in no manner proceed from corporal sufferings, or any other outward penalties.' 'I may grow rich by an art that I take not delight in; I may be cured of some disease by remedies that I have not faith in; but I cannot be saved by a religion that I distrust and a ritual that I abhor.' (*First Letter concerning Toleration.*) And much more in the same

excellent vein. But Locke fixed limits to toleration. 1. No opinions contrary to human society, or to those moral rules which are necessary to the preservation of civil society, are to be tolerated by the magistrate. Thus, to take examples from our own day, a conservative minister would think himself right on this principle in suppressing the Land and Labour League; a catholic minister in dissolving the Education League; and any minister in making mere membership of the Mormon sect a penal offence. 2. No tolerance ought to be extended to 'those who attribute unto the faithful, religious, and orthodox, that is in plain terms unto themselves, any peculiar privilege or power above other mortals, in civil concernments; or who, upon pretence of religion, do challenge any manner of authority over such as are not associated with them in their ecclesiastical communion.' As I have seldom heard of any sect, except the Friends, who did not challenge as much authority as it could possibly get over persons not associated with it, this would amount to a universal proscription of religion; but Locke's principle might at any rate be invoked against Ultramontanism in some circumstances. 3. Those are not at all to be tolerated who deny the being of God. The taking away of God, *though but even in thought*, dissolves all society; and promises, covenants, and oaths, which are the bonds of human society, have no hold on such. Thus the police ought to close Mr.

Bradlaugh's Hall of Science, and perhaps on some occasions the Positivist School.

Locke's principles depended on a distinction between civil concernments, which he tries to define, and all other concernments. Warburton's arguments on the alliance between church and state turned on the same point, as did the once-famous Bangorian controversy. This distinction would fit into Mr. Mill's cardinal position, which consists in a distinction between the things that only affect the doer or thinker of them, and the things that affect other persons as well. Locke's attempt to divide civil affairs from affairs of salvation, was satisfactory enough for the comparatively narrow object with which he opened his discussion. Mr. Mill's account of civil affairs is both wider and more definite; naturally so, as he had to maintain the cause of tolerance in a much more complex set of social conditions, and amid a far greater diversity of speculative energy, than any one dreamed of in Locke's time. Mr. Mill limits the province of the civil magistrate to the repression of acts that directly and immediately injure others than the doer of them. So long as acts, including the expression of opinions, are purely self-regarding, it seems to him expedient in the long run that they should not be interfered with by the magistrate. He goes much further than this. Self-regarding acts should not be interfered with by the magistrate. Not only self-regarding acts, but all

opinions whatever, should, moreover, be as little interfered with as possible by public opinion, except in the way of vigorous argumentation and earnest persuasion in a contrary direction; the silent but most impressive solicitation of virtuous example; the wise and careful upbringing of the young, so that when they enter life they may be most nobly fitted to choose the right opinions and obey the right motives.

The consideration by which he supports this rigorous confinement of external interference on the part of government, or the unorganised members of the community whose opinion is called public opinion, to cases of self-protection, are these, some of which have been already stated:—

1. By interfering to suppress opinions or experiments in living, you may resist truths and improvements in a greater or less degree.

2. Constant discussion is the only certain means of preserving the freshness of truth in men's minds, and the vitality of its influence upon their conduct and motives.

3. Individuality is one of the most valuable elements of wellbeing, and you can only be sure of making the most of individuality, if you have an atmosphere of freedom, encouraging free development and expansion.

4. Habitual resort to repressive means of influencing conduct tends more than anything else to dis-

credit and frustrate the better means, such as education, good example, and the like. (*Liberty*, 148.)

The principle which he deduces from these considerations is—'that the sole end for which mankind are warranted, individually or collectively, in interfering with the liberty of action of any of their number is self-protection; the only purpose for which power can be rightfully exercised over any member of a civilised community, is to prevent harm to others. His own good, either physical or moral, is not a sufficient warrant. He cannot be rightfully compelled to do or forbear because it will make him happier, because in the opinion of others to do so would be wise or even right. These are good reasons for remonstrating with him, or reasoning with him, or persuading him, or entreating him, but not for compelling him, or visiting him with any evil in case he do otherwise. To justify that, the conduct from which it is desired to deter him must be calculated to produce evil to others.' (*Liberty*, 22.)

Two disputable points in the above doctrine are likely at once to reveal themselves to the least critical eye. First, that doctrine would seem to check the free expression of disapproval; one of the most wholesome and indispensable duties which anybody with interest in serious questions has to perform, and the non-performance of which would remove the

most proper and natural penalty from frivolous or perverse opinions and obnoxious conduct. Mr. Mill deals with this difficulty as follows:—'We have a right in various ways to act upon our unfavourable opinion of any one, not to the oppression of his individuality, but in the exercise of ours. We are not bound, for example, to seek his society; we have a right to avoid it (though not to parade the avoidance) for we have a right to choose the society most acceptable to us. We have a right, and it may be our duty, to caution others against him, if we think his example or conversation likely to have a pernicious effect on those with whom he associates. We may give others a preference over him in optional good offices, except those which tend to his improvement. In these various modes a person may suffer very severe penalties at the hands of others for faults which directly concern only himself; but he suffers these penalties only in so far as they are the natural, and as it were the spontaneous, consequences of the faults themselves, not because they are purposely inflicted on him for the sake of punishment.' (*Liberty*, 139.) This appears to be a satisfactory way of meeting the objection. For though the penalties of disapproval may be just the same, whether deliberately inflicted, or naturally and spontaneously falling on the object of such disapproval, yet there is a very intelligible difference between the two processes in their effect on the two parties con-

cerned. A person imbued with Mr. Mill's principle would feel the responsibility of censorship much more seriously; would reflect more carefully and candidly about the conduct or opinion of which he thought ill; would be more on his guard against pharisaic censoriousness, and that desire to be ever judging one another, which Milton well called the stronghold of our hypocrisy. The disapproval of such a person would have an austere colour, a gravity, a self-respecting reserve, which could never belong to an equal degree of disapproval in a person who had started from the officious principle, that if we are sure we are right, it is straightway our business to make the person whom we think wrong smart for his error. And in the same way such disapproval would be much more impressive to the person whom it affected. If it was justified, he would be like a froward child who is always less effectively reformed—if reformable at all—by angry chidings and passionate punishments than by the sight of a cool and austere displeasure which lets him persist in his frowardness if he chooses.

The second weak point in the doctrine lies in the extreme vagueness of the terms, protective and self-regarding. The practical difficulty begins with the definition of these terms. Can any opinion, or any serious part of conduct, be looked upon as truly and exclusively self-regarding? This central ingredient in

the discussion seems insufficiently laboured in the essay on Liberty. Yet it is here more than anywhere else that controversy is needed to clear up what is in just as much need of elucidation, whatever view we may take of the inherent virtue of freedom—whether we look on freedom as a mere negation, or as one of the most powerful positive conditions of attaining the highest kind of human excellence.

To some persons the analysis of conduct, on which the whole doctrine of liberty rests, seems metaphysical and arbitrary. They are reluctant to admit there are any self-regarding acts at all. This reluctance implies a perfectly tenable proposition, a proposition which has been maintained by nearly all religious bodies in the world's history in their non-latitudinarian stages. To distinguish the self-regarding from the other parts of conduct, strikes them not only as unscientific, but as morally and socially mischievous. They insist that there is a social as well as a personal element in every human act, though in very different proportions. There is no gain, they contend, and there may be much harm, in trying to mark off actions, in which the personal element decisively preponderates, from actions of another sort. Mr. Mill did so distinguish actions, nor was his distinction either metaphysical or arbitrary in its source. As a matter of observation, and for the practical purposes of morality, there are kinds of action whose consequences do not go beyond the doer of them.

No doubt, you may say that by engaging in these kinds in any given moment, the doer is neglecting the actions in which the social element preponderates, and therefore even acts that seem purely self-regarding have indirect and negative consequences to the rest of the world. But to allow considerations of this sort to prevent us from using a common-sense classification of acts by the proportion of the personal element in them, is as unreasonable as if we allowed the doctrine of the conservation of physical force, or the evolution of one mode of force into another, to prevent us from classifying the affections of matter independently, as light, heat, motion, and the rest. There is one objection obviously to be made to most of the illustrations which are designed to show the public element in all private conduct. The connection between the act and its influence on others is so remote (using the word in a legal sense), though quite certain, distinct, and traceable, that you can only take the act out of the self-regarding category, by a process which virtually denies the existence of any such category. You must set a limit to this 'indirect and at-a-distance argument,' as Locke called a similar plea, and the setting of this limit is the natural supplement to Mr. Mill's 'simple principle.'

The division between self-regarding acts and others, then, rests on observation of their actual consequences. And why was Mr. Mill so anxious to erect self-regarding acts into a distinct and important class, so important

as to be carefully and diligently secured by a special principle of liberty? Because observation of the recorded experience of mankind teaches us, that the recognition of this independent provision is essential to the richest expansion of human faculty. To narrow or to repudiate such a province, and to insist exclusively on the social bearing of each part of conduct, is to limit the play of motives, and to thwart the doctrine that 'mankind obtain a greater sum of happiness when each pursues his own, under the rules and conditions required by the rest, than when each makes the good of the rest his only object.' To narrow or to repudiate such a province is to tighten the power of the majority over the minority, and to augment the authority of whatever sacerdotal or legislative body may represent the majority. Whether the lawmakers be laymen in parliament, or priests of humanity exercising the spiritual power, it matters not.

We may best estimate the worth and the significance of the doctrine of Liberty by considering the line of thought and observation which led to it. To begin with, it is in Mr. Mill's hands something quite different from the same doctrine as preached by the French revolutionary school; indeed one might even call it reactionary, in respect of the French theory of a hundred years back. It reposes on no principle of abstract right, but, like the rest of its author's opinions, on principles of utility

and experience. Dr. Arnold used to divide reformers into two classes, popular and liberal. The first he defined as seekers of liberty, the second as seekers of improvement; the first were the goats, and the second were the sheep. Mr. Mill's doctrine denied the mutual exclusiveness of the two parts of this classification, for it made improvement the end and the test, while it proclaimed liberty to be the means. Every thinker now perceives that the strongest and most durable influences in every western society lead in the direction of democracy, and tend with more or less rapidity to throw the control of social organisation into the hands of numerical majorities. There are many people who believe that if you only make the ruling body big enough, it is sure to be either very wise itself, or very eager to choose wise leaders. Mr. Mill, as any one who is familiar with his writings is well aware, did not hold this opinion. He had no more partiality for mob rule than De Maistre or Goethe or Mr. Carlyle. He saw its evils more clearly than any of these eminent men, because he had a more scientific eye, and because he had had the invaluable training of a political administrator on a large scale, and in a very responsible post. But he did not content himself with seeing these evils, and he wasted no energy in passionate denunciation of them, which he knew must prove futile. Guizot said of De Tocqueville, that he was an aristocrat who accepted his defeat. Mr. Mill was too penetrated by

popular sympathies to be an aristocrat in De Tocqueville's sense, but he likewise was full of ideas and hopes which the unchecked or undirected course of democracy would defeat without chance of reparation. This fact he accepted, and from this he started. Mr. Carlyle, and one or two rhetorical imitators, poured malediction on the many-headed populace, and with a rather pitiful impatience insisted that the only hope for men lay in their finding and obeying a strong man, a king, a hero, a dictator. How he was to be found, neither the master nor his still angrier and more impatient mimics could ever tell us.

Now Mr. Mill's doctrine laid down the main condition of finding your hero; namely, that all ways should be left open to him, because no man, nor majority of men, could possibly tell by which of these ways their deliverers were from time to time destined to present themselves. Wits have caricatured all this, by asking us whether by encouraging the tares to grow, you give the wheat a better chance. This is as misleading as such metaphors usually are. The doctrine of liberty rests on a faith drawn from the observation of human progress, that though we know wheat to be serviceable and tares to be worthless, yet there are in the great seed-plot of human nature a thousand rudimentary germs, not wheat and not tares, of whose properties we have not had a fair opportunity of assuring ourselves. If you are too eager to pluck up the tares, you are very likely to pluck up with

them these untried possibilities of human excellence, and you are, moreover, very likely to injure the growing wheat as well. The demonstration of this lies in the recorded experience of mankind.

Nor is this all. Mr. Mill's doctrine does not lend the least countenance to the cardinal opinion of some writers in the last century, that the only need of human character and of social institutions is to be let alone. He never said that we were to leave the ground uncultivated, to bring up whatever might chance to grow. On the contrary, the ground was to be cultivated with the utmost care and knowledge, with a view to prevent the growth of tares — but cultivated in a certain manner. You may take the method of the Inquisition, of the more cruel of the Puritans, of De Maistre, of Mr. Carlyle ; or you may take Mr. Mill's method of cultivation. According to the doctrine of Liberty, we are to devote ourselves to prevention, as the surest and most wholesome mode of extirpation. Persuade ; argue ; cherish virtuous example ; bring up the young in habits of right opinion and right motive ; shape your social arrangements so as to stimulate the best parts of character. By these means you will gain all the advantages that could possibly have come of heroes and legislative dragooning, as well as a great many more which neither heroes nor legislative dragooning could ever have secured.

It is well with men, Mr. Mill said, moreover, in proportion as they respect truth. Now they at once prove and strengthen their respect for truth, by having an open mind to all its possibilities, while at the same time they hold firmly to their own proved convictions, until they hear better evidence to the contrary. There is no anarchy, nor uncertainty, nor paralysing air of provisionalness in such a frame of mind. So far is it from being fatal to loyalty or reverence, that it is an indispensable part of the groundwork of the only loyalty that a wise ruler or teacher would care to inspire—the loyalty springing from a rational conviction that, in a field open to all comers, he is the best man they can find. Only on condition of liberty without limit is the ablest and most helpful of 'heroes' sure to be found; and only on condition of liberty without limit are his followers sure to be worthy of him. You must have authority, and yet must have obedience. The noblest and deepest and most beneficent kind of authority is that which rests on an obedience that is rational and spontaneous.

The same futile impatience which animates the political utterances of Mr. Carlyle and his more weak-voiced imitators, takes another form in men of a different training or temperament. They insist that if the majority has the means of preventing vice by law, it is folly and weakness not to resort to these means.

The superficial attractiveness of such a doctrine is obvious. The doctrine of liberty implies a broader and a more patient view. It says :—Even if you could be sure that what you take for vice is so—and the history of persecution shows how careful you should be in this preliminary point—even then it is an undoubted and, indeed, a necessary tendency of this facile repressive legislation, to make those who resort to it neglect the more effective, humane, and durable kinds of preventive legislation. You pass a law (if you can) putting down drunkenness; there is a neatness in such a method very attractive to fervid and impatient natures. Would you not have done better to leave that law unpassed, and apply yourselves sedulously instead to the improvement of the dwellings of the more drunken class, to the provision of amusements that might compete with the ale-house, to the extension and elevation of instruction, and so on? You may say that this should be done, and yet the other should not be left undone; but, as matter of fact and history, the doing of the one has always gone with the neglect of the other, and ascetic law-making in the interests of virtue has never been accompanied either by law-making or any other kinds of activity for making virtue easier or more attractive. It is the recognition how little punishment can do, that leaves men free to see how much social prevention can do. I believe, then, that what seems to the

criminal lawyers and passionate philanthropists self-evident, is in truth an illusion, springing from a very shallow kind of impatience, heated in some of them by the addition of a cynical contempt for human nature and the worth of human existence.

If people believe that the book of social or moral knowledge is now completed, that we have turned over the last page and heard the last word, much of the foundation of Mr. Mill's doctrine would disappear. But those who hold this can hardly have much to congratulate themselves upon. If it were so, and if governments were to accept the principle that the only limits to the enforcement of the moral standard of the majority are the narrow expediencies of each special case, without reference to any deep and comprehensive principle covering all the largest considerations, why, then, the society to which we ought to look with most admiration and envy, is the Eastern Empire during the ninth and tenth centuries, when the Byzantine system of a thorough subordination of the spiritual power had fully consolidated itself!

THE END.

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